Blackbird singing in the dead of night

Posted originally on the Archive of Our Own at http://archiveofourown.org/works/9483230.

Rating:	Mature
Archive Warning:	No Archive Warnings Apply
Categories:	F/M, Gen, M/M
Fandoms:	Hannibal Lecter Series - All Media Types, Hannibal (TV)
Relationships:	Hannibal Lecter & Will Graham, Team Sassy Science - Relationship, lecter family, Bella Crawford /Jack Crawford, Abigail Hobbs & Matthew Brown, Will Graham & Mischa Lecter, Mischa Lecter & Chiyoh
Characters:	Hannibal Lecter, Will Graham, team sassy science - Character, Mischa Lecter, Chiyoh, Abigail Hobbs, Beverly Katz, Freddie Lounds, Brian Zeller, Bella Crawford, Bedelia Du Maurier, Jimmy Price, Matthew Brown, Donald Sutcliffe, Abel Gideon, Alana Bloom, The Chesapeake Ripper - Character, franklyn froidveaux
Additional Tags:	secrets and lies, ppizza trope, slowish burn, Hannigram - Freeform, Season 1, After lost boys, talks about illness, secrets and ties, AU, Dr Plushy Pants, puns, Totem animals, the parliament of the animals, protection charms, canon adjacent, Shit stirring, wtf?, Alana is a drama llama, Serial Killers, the Ripper, MORE SHIT, being stirred, Angst, Fluff, Domestic Fluff
Language:	English
Series:	Part 11 of The Dr Plushy Pants Collection
Stats:	Published: 2017-01-28 Completed: 2017-02-05 Words: 33,829 Chapters: 9/9

Blackbird singing in the dead of night

by AtticusCrete

Summary

As Hannigram gathers steam there's one or two people who'd like to see that come a cropper. Fortunately our heroes have friends. Not in high places. Just friends.
Or
Pizza, cake, beer, the mildest form of bondage you can imagine, it's not even bondage really, Abigail is back (boo hiss) as is Matthew. Bedelia thinks of running away after she covers for one of Hannibal's patient's appointments. And various people consider the problems of text messaging instead of actually communicating.

Take these broken wings

When he met Mischa for the first time Will wore a look of gentle disbelief on his face for the whole afternoon. They agree not to tell Hannibal, who is clearly waiting for some unspecified moment to confess all. It's a complicated and sad story. Will hasn't got the full picture yet. But it sounds like something very bad. A long time ago.

Mischa was slightly agitated that either Chiyoh or Hannibal would find her downstairs so there isn't time to get much beyond the basics. She's been in the US with Hannibal for the last five years. Chiyoh, the woman who owns the cabin Will stayed in, is a sort of friend/companion, whom the Lecter family have known since they were all children. She was some sort of charge of Hannibal and Mischa's Japanese aunt, Hannibal has mentioned her a few times.

Will can't come up with a plan to meet her again, but she says it will just happen. When he's next here. She'll come and find him. She twinkles a bit. 'Unless you're with Hannibal. In his room.' Will feels himself flush. Wow. But she must be his age so there's no need for him to be embarrassed. It's just she has this air of innocence. But she's also Hannibal's sister and he sees both the spark of humour and intelligence that from Hannibal provokes a mixture of besottedness and lust in Will.

When he and Hannibal eat together that evening he wonders why Hannibal hasn't said anything yet. Though if it's traumatic enough it's possible he's trying to protect Will. Though Will's own traumas may mean Hannibal is trying to protect Mischa from him. Either way he hopes Hannibal will decide to let him inside in the not too distant future.

The food is as good as ever. If they are a little subdued it's perhaps not surprising in the light of the last few days. After dinner they both sit quietly and read. This time in the small library. It's the room in which Will feels most at home. He's starting to feel like he knows where certain books he likes are. Sometime a little after ten pm. He starts to realise he's read the same paragraph several times. He realises he's slightly worrying about the sleeping arrangements.

'I can hear you thinking'

'I was wondering how we're going to manage the sleeping arrangements.'

'Do you want to try the robe tie again? It worked both at the cabin and in Wolf Trap?'

'Would that be alright? Could we stay in the sea room?'

'The C room'

'The one with blues and greens and whites. That I used the last time, oh, and maybe the time before too? I like it. It's soothing. And my brain might remember it too. So I pee in the bathroom and not the wardrobe?'

'Definitely that room in that case. Have you ever urinated in a wardrobe?'

'No but I was sick in one once.'

'I think I don't wish to know'

'Ok. I'll save it. It's a good story'

'Hmm. No doubt. Are you thinking of sleeping soon'

'I'm thinking about trying to sleep soon.'

'Will you try the tablets Donald gave you?'

'Yeah. He said they might make a bit weird, but I'm not sure we'd know the difference!'

'I'll get you some water'

'Thanks'

.....

Two hours later Will is still awake but not for a bad reason. He's half lying on Hannibal, tied to him by a long dressing gown cord, kissing him. Slowly. Gently, exploring, deep. His arm has gone to sleep where he's got it squashed under him to help prop him up so he doesn't sprawl too much. He knows he'll have pins and needles when he moves. You don't get that in love scenes in movies. That horrible hopping around on a foot that's asleep, or flinging a hand around trying to pick something up, but your fingers are numb.

Hannibal is a good kisser. They still haven't got 10,000 hours of practice in but they're working on it. By some unspoken accord they haven't progressed beyond kissing and stroking. Is this second base. It's probably second base. Will isn't quite sure what the rules are these days. Is it odd to be sharing a bed but only be kissing? And for how long does that go on in a relationship? And are there rules these days? And he's only assumed that Hannibal actually might like or want sex. What if he's asexual and he'll be more than happy with this, for ever?

But it is nice. Better than nice. Normally he'd be as hard as iron by now but the medication has probably done for that for tonight. Shit. If that's a side effect that'll be rubbish! He's carefully kept away from Hannibal's cock. Partly so he doesn't realise that Will isn't hard. Partly because it means there might be several conversations they should have before that step. But the kissing is good. He sighs. And then embarrassingly he yawns.

'That good?'

'I think the drugs are working'

'Then that is good. Roll over. I'll lie behind you. You'll be safe.'

'Thank you.' He wriggles over and Hannibal lies behind him putting an arm round him 's'nice' he yawns again. Reassured by the erection that Hannibal isn't bothering to hide but also isn't doing anything with. It feels nice where it is. Will wriggles a little closer into Hannibal who squeezes him gently. They both sleep. And Will doesn't sleepwalk or have a nightmare or sweat like the Niagara Falls. A good night.

In the morning they're lying the other way round. They haven't managed to strangle each other with the cord which is a good thing. Will unties himself and goes to the bathroom. In the mirror he thinks he looks half way human. When he finishes towelling his hair he goes back into the bedroom. Hannibal is just about awake. His hair is a birds nest. Will wishes he had a camera though that might cause hilarity in the team, there's no way he'd keep it a secret from Bev.

.....

Over breakfast Will gets a text from Jack

i heard you're not well. I'm sorry. I hope it wasn't the case. Bella says you'd be very welcome if you wanted to have coffee or afternoon cake or something. Will you ring her? Only if you're up to it. She gets a bit bored when she's had chemo and can't do much. She said you'd be the kind of company she'd like. Cheers. Jack

'Double wow. Hannibal. Look at this text from Jack, I think he's been taken over by aliens*

'I can see why you'd think so. Will you see Bella? I can either drop you and you get a taxi back or the other way round. What would you prefer?'

'I would like to see her. Maybe you drop me so I'm good at the start then I'll come back in a taxi when I can just slump.'

'Alright. Now I'm going to say fussy things like don't overdo it and don't push yourself too hard. And then I'm going to stop, knowing you will almost certainly do too much.'

'Yeah. Yeah. Alright. Tell you what I'll try and do 20 minutes less of too much.'

'Oh. What sacrifice, what courage, but imagine if there is good cake you might lose track of time?'

'Ahh. Rats. Caught!'

.....

As Hannibal drives away he thinks about the experience of lying with Will during the night. He already wants to feel used to it. They've shared a bed, granted in mostly trying circumstances, on at least six occasions. Hannibal adores it. The feel of Will next to him. Him grumbling if he turns over, or the covers get pulled away, or are too heavy. The way he always leans over to kiss Hannibal on the cheek just before he goes to sleep. His way of wriggling to get comfortable fitting around Hannibal. Hannibal finds it all a source of great pleasure.

He's quelling any treacherous thoughts of sexual frustration. There's plenty of time for that. He has a moment to wonder if that is something Will wants at all. It's warm and intimate and also surprisingly platonic. Maybe he's quite asexual and enjoys the intimacy without the need for something sexual. If that's the case Hannibal admits he will be hugely disappointed. He's reluctant to admit it but he feels slightly desperately aroused by Will. Even when Will is at his worst. Which can be quite spectacularly bad.

Still. Where they are now is a good place to be. Almost certainly. Hopefully. With any luck. He must must MUST deal with the family stuff soon. It isn't fair on anyone.

.....

'Hannibal? Is he here again? Will he stay this time?'

'He will stay another night and then he must go home again. He hasn't seen his dogs for more than week I'm sure they miss him.'

'Won't you miss him when he goes?'

'Yes. But he will come back. It will be alright my love. The doctor was very positive'

'I hope so. I want you to be happy'

'You are the best of sisters how could I be anything but?'

'I love you Hannibal'

'And I you'

.....

'Will? Will!'

Will looks around, he's in the living room again. He's just come back from seeing Bella. Someone is whispering to him. He goes to the curtains. Rolled up inside one Mischa is looking at him

'I realised that if you always share a room with Hannibal I won't see you. So I have a plan. I'll leave you notes. And you can leave me notes. Lets hide them in a book in the library.'

'Alright. Do you have a book in mind?'

'Alice. Through the Looking Glass'

'Sort of appropriate somehow'

'Oh good. I thought that too. We don't need to leave one every time you come, just sometimes. Would you like that?'

'I would. Thank you. I've also faintly got an idea which I'll think about and share with you maybe next time. A surprise. Maybe.'

'For Hannibal?'

'I think so. I'm only just starting to have the idea.'

'He's not very good with surprises but we can make a nice one I think'

'I think so too'

.....

Over the evening meal Will talks about Bella and how she is. He'd only met her a few times previously but always liked her. Hannibal has had Bella and Jack for dinner several times. The Lost Boys case prompted Jack to really ask Bella what was going on. It was then she owned up to having been being treated for cancer for several months. It explains her tiredness, her lack of appetite. Her distance.

She and Will talked about the dynamics of illness whilst they ate small cakes and drank tea in the afternoon. Hard for some people to be around. Don't want to say the wrong thing, don't say anything, which is sometimes the wrong thing. But as with pretty well anything there is no one size fits all. Every illness is personal, individual, every soft word or robust suggestion should be too. Bellis asks Will about how he manages, and laughs when he explains it's about as well as her sometimes!

They are surprised by how easily the time passes.

'Lets do this again. It's been good for me, you too?'

'Yes. Just don't ask me about Jack!' They both laugh. Either of them could have said it.

'I don't know if this would appeal but would you like to come and eat pizza with the science team? We're getting together tomorrow night? Or even another time? My place in Wolf Trap?'

'It sounds ridiculous, so I might. I like Jimmy Price, I don't know the others. Jimmy's like a fixture. He's been around for a long time'

'Brian's pretty good too. He's had a bumpy year but he's sweetening up now. And Bev is great. Even Hannibal likes her pretty well unequivocally, I think initially because she laughed at his puns.'

'She must be the only one!'

'It is his fifth language.'

'That's true. I can only manage two. Well two and a bit. Do you speak anything Will'

'I speak crazy really well. English is usually ok. A bit of creole from my time down there. Some of the family has German. I've a little Spanish. But my Latin and Classical Greek is top

notch!'

'How unexpected'

'I know, we had a wild classics guy teach us history one year in high school, he got me hooked on the philosophy and the myths and then said you had to know the original language. So I learnt. Did evening classes in Greek in college'

'Well there's a thing!'

'You?'

'Oh. English as well. Mostly. Italian. And quite a bit of French.'

'Aren't we the modern cosmopolitans!'

.....

The night is once again spent peacefully. Will fell asleep faster and easier. Hannibal watches him and wonders if he could risk getting up. He decides it's better not to, after all, tomorrow Will shall be home. And he will have an evening free.

Will sleeps all the way through. In the morning he has his arms wrapped round Hannibal's waist with his head pressed into his spine. Hannibal too has slept solidly. Neither of them stir when the door is softly pushed open and then closed just as quietly again.

.....

'Pizza, pizza, pizza, parteeeeee.'

'I can hear pizza singers'

'Is that like carol singers but with food?'

'It is. I'm hoping it will be Beverly and Jimmy who swore they'd bring the pizza.'

'I brought beer' Alana holds up two six packs of beer, she has another two sets in carrier bags at her feet.'

'I brought a gateau which I think we might be sick if we eat too much of' Zeller is rather proud of the very large gateau he bought from the Jewish bakery near him. He gets a discount from the owner as they went to school together. He quite likes that he lives where he grew up. Hates it too, of course.

Bella has indeed come and has brought a selection of very bad movies. Or movies that are so bad they're good. She's brought snax as well. No matter how much pizza and gateau you eat there's always room for snax too. She's arranged for a car to collect her later which means no one has to worry about Jack. And isn't it good not to talk about work for an evening? Especially after the case from hell?

When Bev sees her she straight off says 'I'm really pleased to meet you. Jack says you're not well. I'm rubbish with sympathy ask any of them, (they nod, so she frowns at her co-workers) but I'm good with pizza. And puns. And really I'm good in a tight spot. So, you need anything (apart from sympathy) I'm good for it'

Jimmy punches her lightly in the shoulder 'hey Bella, it's nice to see you. What Bev said, but more tactfully'

'Oh I'm already bored of tact,'

'See, I told you?'

It looks like this might work out ok. Will Graham social smoothy, said no one. Ever.

.....

Sometime just after midnight, Bella's car collects her and Jimmy and Brian trail each other out. Alana goes citing an early meeting with some students whose work isn't as it might be. It's just a Bev and Will.

'So. If it suits you I think I'm going to stay the night. Is that alright. I brought non slutty pyjamas so I wouldn't shock the dogs!'

She holds up a pair of pink flannel pyjamas. Looking at the more closely they've got pictures of different small dogs on them.

'They are the best pyjamas I've ever seen Bev'

'I knew you'd like them. I've got you a pair, a bit bigger than these obviously, for Christmas, in case I draw you in the secret santa at work!'

'And if you don't?'

'I'll give them to you anyway'

'Well that's a huge relief!'

They grin at one another. They spend the next twenty minutes tidying up and then fight over who gets the duvet or sleeping bag. Will explains about the robe tie.

'Wow. Bondage already. I'm not sure if we're quite there yet Graham! I'm not that kind of girl you know?'

'Very good. I think you are exactly that kind of girl. My dad used to do it when I was a kid. Just tie me by an Ankle or wrist to the bed. It works well. Better though to another person. Do you mind. Say if you do. I won't be offended I'll just tie it to the bed frame. I've actually slept all the way through the last two nights. The medication seems to really work.'

'Did you tie your self to Dr L too? No. don't worry you don't have to tell me that. Don't worry. Sure I don't mind. Not the weirdest sleep over I've ever had.'

Will texts Hannibal

hey. We had a good evening. I hope you have too. Bella sends her regards (again) do two regards = one dinner, or is it three? She's getting there! I miss you already. Will

.....

At some point in the night someone stands on the porch of Will's house and takes some photographs of the two people lying on the bed tied by the wrist to one another. At some point Bev has thrown a leg and arm over Will, and he is partly starfished on his front across three quarters of the bed. It's a companionable pile but open to misinterpretation.

In the morning Hannibal opens his cell phone to the text from Will (he smiles) and then one from a number he doesn't recognise. He frowns slightly, and opens it. It has multiple pictures of Will and Beverly asleep together. Hannibal is quietly furious. Not with Will. Or with Beverly. But with whoever has sent the photographs.

It's a nasty bit of malicious shit stirring. Oh no. For a moment he thinks Freddie Lounds, then he thinks that'd be more likely to be on the front page of Tattle Crime. He goes into the library and retrieves his tablet. He's hugely relieved that they're not there yet. But they might be. He had better tell Will. And Beverly. Damn

Learn to fly

Chapter Summary

The team consider the implications. What the merry fuck is going on?

Will wakes up to hear his cell phone ringing. He answers it

'Lo?'

'Will, it's Hannibal I'm sorry but something rather irritating has happened. Could you wake up Beverly please.'

'Hannibal, hello, how did you know she was still here?' Will pulls himself up in bed,

'Could you wake her and then put me on speaker phone, is her cell to hand?'

'Yeah, hang on, it's on the floor. Bev, Beverly, Bev wake up. It's Hannibal..'

'Tell him Hello and I'm going back to sleep'

'No, listen something's happened, listen, wake up'

Beverly's cell phone buzzes and Will holds it out to her, he puts his cell on the bed between them now on speaker.

'Beverly, Will I've just sent some photos to Beverly that I was sent this morning. I don't know who they came from, I don't recognise the number. Before we say anything more I want you to be clear I am not concerned in the slightest. I think the intention may have been to disrupt our relationship, if so, it failed.'

Beverly and Will frown at each other and then they have a brief struggle over who gets Bev's phone. She wins and opens the text from Hannibal. 'Well double shit. That's just rude.' She hands the phone to Will. He thumbs through the photos. And closes his eyes. It's a good job Hannibal is mostly sensible and knows Beverly. If Hannibal were to suggest there was anything between her and Will she'd have a hard time not falling off a chair laughing. The phrase LMAO could have been invented for that suggestion as far as she's concerned.

Will though is fairly instantly sunk into a state of despondency 'they took that from the porch. From the porch. Just outside the window. They were just outside the window. Last night. Whilst we were asleep.' His tone is flat. Yesterday he had felt optimistic after having had several helpful conversations with Hannibal, having finally seen a doctor, having an enjoyable time with friends. And here he is back in the shit again. Why does he even bother?

Beverly looks at his face. 'Hannibal I'm just going to take the phone into the kitchen whilst I make some coffee, so I'm taking you off speaker. Will I'm going to make coffee, have a shower and come and get a cup when you're done'

she weaves her way through the dogs

'well you lot were no bloody use why didn't you bark or something?'

She goes into the kitchen and shuts the door 'Hannibal? Can you hear me? Do you have any clue? Send me the number, I'm going to get Jack in on this. He won't want Will harassed. Or me for that matter. Or you. I'll bring Will to the lab. I'll look after him.'

'Beverly. Is he, no he won't be alright will he? Damn. He's had too much stress the last few weeks. I'm going to call his doctor. When he comes out of the shower ask him to call me will you. He'll resist the idea, but please try. I'm sorry you've been dragged in to whatever this is. I don't think it's directed at you. I might be wrong though?'

'Who do you think it is? It's got Freddie Lounds all over it. Could it be her? I don't think it's me either. I was just here, and useful.'

'I wondered about Ms Lounds, but it's not on the website so I think maybe not. It feels a little too personal. That doesn't mean she won't get them. I may try for something pre-emptive in that respect. Will you keep in touch. I've a meeting this morning. But I'm free after lunch I'll try and come to the lab then if it's useful in any way. Thank you for looking after Will. I'm so angry. I'm going to have to work at Will not being overwhelmed by it. Please remind him I'm not angry with him'

'Of course. Hannibal, it's just occurred to me. I'm glad I was here. It could have been worse.'

'Yes. I know. It could have been. Thank you Beverly.'

'Ok, Will's coming I'll put him back on' she hands the phone to Will who sits down and puts it to his ear. He seems to have shrunk and been diminished by what has taken place. She knows how smart he is but hopes that just for this morning he doesn't think about what might have happened if she hadn't been here.

He doesn't say much and hands the phone back to Beverly, Hannibal is still speaking 'Will? Will, please don't ' 'Hannibal it's me back again. Sorry.' She looks down at Will who now has his head down on his arms on the table 'I promise I will look after Will. Come this afternoon if you can'. Will looks up at this and shakes his head at her. 'I'll speak to you later. And I'll let you know of any developments at our end'. She ends the call. Will won't look at her. This has never happened before.

'Will, we're going to go to the lab, I'm going to get the interns onto the number and find the shit who sent the pictures. Hannibal is going to be sensible at Freddie in case she's involved. We're going to tell Jack, because this is harassment. Please drink the coffee. I'm going to make some toast. And you're going to eat one piece, you can either choose to eat it, or I choose the toppings and make you eat it. And I can do that. Ask my sister.'

Will doesn't say anything. Slowly he gets up and gets bread out of a breadbin, then the butter and various spreads and jams. Two plates and cutlery. Juice from the fridge and two glasses. Then he sits down again. He still doesn't speak and doesn't look at her.

'Ok. Honey you make the toast, I'll be back in under ten minutes you can time me. I like peanut butter and gherkins if you've got them. Ok? Will?'

He nods just slightly.

When she comes back there are two pieces of toast with peanut butter and gherkins. He's not at the table. She has a small panic and the sees he's out on the porch. There are chalk marks all over it. Different words and signs and symbols. It must have taken a good long while to do it. And the dogs didn't make a sound. He turns and looks at her.

'I'm very glad you're here otherwise I'd think I was going crazy again. You've seen the slides from the talk. This is like one of the student's things. They are here aren't they, it's not a hallucination?'

'Yes. They are. We're getting photos of this too. In fact this should be treated as a crime scene. Come back inside I'm calling Jack now. Will take a couple of photos from the doorway and then send them to Hannibal.'

He frowns slightly 'why? Oh because they know he's involved with me, shit, you're right.' Suddenly showing more animation than he has since he found out he goes back inside and grabs his cell, he clicks off two pictures sends them and then phones Hannibal again.

'Will? What are...?'

'Hannibal listen. Whoever took the photos didn't only do that. They've left a very elaborate calling card all over the porch, I've sent you two photos of it. We're getting Jack out here, and an evidence crew. You need to be careful. If you can you should probably either stay home or go somewhere safe.'

He thinks briefly of Mischa and Chiyoh, 'or you could come here. I don't know how long we'll be. If you decide to go to the meeting please be very careful. An excellent way to get at me would be for something to happen to you. Or vice versa so we must take both into account.'

'How bad is it?'

'Worse than the students, at least they didn't involve anyone else.'

.....

Three hours later Jack and a recovery team plus Brian and Jimmy are all at Will's house in Wolf Trap. Will is concentrating on not feeling violated by the intrusion. Most of these people are people he knows, some are friends, good friends. It isn't like last time.

He and Beverly have agreed to make light of the photos, it has helped that both Jimmy and Zeller laugh when they see them and eventually even Jack smiles. He'd raises his eyebrows at

the information that they'd been sent to Hannibal and got a little quiet for a bit. Eventually he pulls Will aside

'You and Hannibal huh? How long? Bella said she wondered, you must have spent a lot of time with him. I didn't even know you were gay. Or him for that matter. So, how long?'

'Yeah. Sort of. Not long. We've only just acknowledged there might be something to acknowledge. It's very early days. Sort of the "oh, there might be something worth exploring there" stage. Like after a third date? I don't know. How do middle aged men do these things? Anyway it's very new. And I've no idea if Hannibal is gay. I thought you knew I mostly was? It featured in the last lot of harassment? And whoever sent these photos maybe knows that, or knows enough about him and me to know Hannibal would be annoyed. They probably hoped he'd be annoyed with me. It's not a great feeling.'

'I'm struggling to get to the motive behind this?'

'Me too. But seemingly motiveless is what you get sometimes. Intelligent psychopaths, they might never do this again. Impossible to catch usually. Especially if they are disciplined. What are people's motives for anything? Love? money? Power? Usually it comes back to those three, so maybe that's what we've got here.'

'And you can't think of anyone you've pissed off recently?'

'No more than usual. Bad tip to a barista? Cut someone up on the highway? Jostled someone in a queue? I guess someone might be angry about one of the cases - Hobbs, Stammetts, the Lost Boys? Cassie Boyle or Marissa Schurr? They wouldn't even have to be involved. It's not like the cases have been exactly low key.'

'Have you thought about Freddie Lounds?'

'She might have been good for the photographs, even if she didn't take them herself. But I can't see it with the signs and stuff. I suppose there might be something in them. We'll have to take a look back at the lab. Get them blown up on paper and spread out.'

'Do you need the scene?'

Will looks at Jack. He's been thinking about this. He thinks back to the morning. How he instantly felt knocked for a home run, but not in a good way, when Hannibal told him about the photos. He'd felt all the good of his recent achievements pulled out from under him.

'I'm not sure what I'd get when it's this close. I'd like to wait for Hannibal if that's ok Jack. He's the one who'll have to prop me up if I lose it again.'

'He still doing that?'

'We've talked about it a lot. He's not my doctor. If we need someone Jack we'll need to find someone else. But I've been to see my own doctor, he's got me a scan scheduled?'

'A scan? Why? I know you've not been on top of your game. Do they think it's something worse?'

'Hang on here Jack, I'm going to get something, I'll be back in a moment. Actually do you want me to make coffee for everyone? Got be some perks to having a crime on your doorstep right?'

'That's nice of you Will. Thanks.' Jack turns to speak to someone kneeling on the ground looking at something in the grass. She holds up a small bundle of something. Carefully opening it it looks more like a Gris Gris, a protection talisman.

'Alright, now this is just getting weirder. Will you were right to call it in. Good job.'

Will goes back indoors, through the back door this time. He makes coffee. Brian comes and joins him, picks up mugs and sugar and creamer.

'If you need a place to stay Will, I've got a spare room. Could even fit the dogs in. They'd not think to look for you there.'

'They might Brian'

Zeller looks confused for a moment 'why?'

'Because you're my friend too. I did call you when the shit hit the fan. You're important to me as well, you know. Even if you're still dick-brain.'

'You sod.' He pauses for a long moment 'thanks. It means a lot to me.' Will nods at him 'we're alright Z, and I think I'm going to suggest to Jack that we have a team wide conversation about what to do.'

'Is Dr L coming?'

'Yeah. He had a meeting this morning, but he's coming by this afternoon.' He glances at his watch 'maybe soon actually. It's later than I realised. Oh. Reminds me. I've got to show Jack something.'

They take coffee out the various evidence recovery team members and Will takes his medical notes over to Jack.

'Jack. Ok, coffee first, and here are the notes I've been keeping on how I've been doing. It's why I'm having the scan' he hands the file over and takes back Jack's half empty mug so he has his hands free. He reads the file. It takes him maybe 10 minutes. When he's done he passes a hand over his weary face.

'Shit. Will. I don't know what to say. We need you. But we need to find a way for it to not be like this. Even I can see that. Ok. I know I'm tough. But. Ahh. Fuck.' He shakes his head. Will almost feels a wave of sympathy for him. Bella's illness is hitting him hard. And now this. He won't like anyone fucking with the team and won't like it if Will is pulled off the team again.

'It'd be good if we all sat down and tried to work it out? As well as whatever the fuck this is don't you think?'

'Yes. Alright. Ok. Is that Dr Lecter's Bentley'

'Jack, how many people do you actually think I know with a Bentley?'

Even Jack has to smile at that.

.....

When Hannibal arrives Will goes over to him at the car. Beverly and Jack stand in the grass just in front of the porch.

'And to think I was worried about you two'

'Yeah. It's good for him though.'

'You think he'd be worse if Dr Lecter hadn't been around?'

'Infinitely worse. He'd already be catatonic in some hospital somewhere. He's almost functional at the moment.'

'Bella says it was good last night'

'It was, it was great. But Will keeps being thrown from one extreme to the other. Shit then fun then back to shit again. Hannibal is a kind of middle way for Will. When he's not completely angst ridden over how bad Will is! Keep an eye on that. Because then Will worries about Hannibal worrying about Will.'

'Peachy.'

'You do it too. You know you do'

'Yeah alright Ms Katz. Don't psychoanalyse me, you wouldn't like me when I'm psychoanalysed.'

'That's what Will says.'

'I'm beginning to understand how he feels. Dr Lecter, Hannibal, I'm glad to see you. And sorry about this too.'

'Jack', they shake hands.

.....

Later after most of the recovery team has gone the group that remains sits in Will's living room. He's set the sofa back into sitting mode to ensure everyone gets a seat.

'So what do we do next? Anyone got initial thoughts?'

'We got a warrant for the phones at lunch time, Dr L gave his signed permission (he nods) there was some hiccup with one of the networks but it's gone through now. We should have results back by tomorrow. I hope'

'Ok, that's good thanks Bev. Jimmy what about fingerprints?'

'Two off the windowsill outside the living room, where the pictures were taken. Not Will's we checked them straight off. We're running them now. Smudges off the porch but nothing usable. One footprint on one of the step risers. Smallish, running it now too, for size and brand.'

'Symbols? The pouch?'

'Got someone looking at them at Columbia or the pictures of them at least.'

'What pouch?' Asks Hannibal.

'Zeller rifles through some prints and hands it to Hannibal. He looks at it for a few minutes and then hands it off to Will, he looks at the rest of the team

'is there any reason why this might not be two people with two different agendas? Possibly even at different times of the night? In particular I'm wondering if the photos came first and the chalking second, possibly as a response. The pouch is a protection talisman. I wonder if someone is trying to protect Will, and acted after they saw whoever took the pictures depart?'

There's one of those moments when everyone looks at each other, two people? Not one? What on earth!?

Will sighs 'shall we just put up a sign or something, give tours of the house, maybe advertise on tattlecrime.com ? I mean. Really? I hate the photos and that they were sent to Hannibal. But the protection thing? That just has a very odd feel to it, it's like someone not quite..' he stops. In the recent past he's met two people who are not quite. He doesn't finish his sentence, starts a different one

'So. All of us might be touched by either of these things. The photos were probably meant to cause a rift between me and Hannibal, or possibly me and Bev, or Bev and Hannibal. Or Bev/me and the rest of the team. Or between any of the three of us and Jack. So far that's been averted because we've got the sense to talk about it. But. At first I couldn't. It tripped me badly. What straightened me out was seeing the chalk marks. I thought it meant that Hannibal might be in danger. And I find it easier to work on someone else's behalf than my own.

So. We need to be aware that this might be targeted at us as a team and I'm just a weak link. I don't mean I'm not important in the team, just mentally and emotionally weaker. That's ok. It's the cost of the other stuff. Lets not worry about that now (he sees both Beverly and Hannibal look at each other). Who benefits from us being broken apart?'

'Do you mean ongoing cases? Ok, so the Ripper, although that's semi closed due to inactivity, the copycat which may or may not include Marissa and Cassie, the Hobbs case, Stammetts, the parents of some of the boys in the lost boys case aren't happy, what else is pre-trial? Any of those maybe? Plus anyone planning something. Some of our special brand of psychos do plan ahead. It could be a long list.'

'Unfortunately the recent coverage of several of these cases in the press means that we are all widely known in connection to them.'

'So, now we have to think about how to mitigate some of this. Ok?' They all nod at Jack. 'Ok then'...

All my life

Chapter Summary

> Why do things get weirder before they get normaler? Oh and Alana gets the wrong end of the stick, again. And it's all gone wibbly wobbly ....

'I guess there are worse ways for Jack to find out.'

Hannibal and Will are on their way back to Baltimore. Again.

'Possibly. I think we may have had something of a sympathy vote in our favour. Though I think that wasn't the intended outcome. Quite the opposite.'

'Remind me to say thank you to them once we find out who it is'

'You are as kind as ever'

'Think of it as a kind of twisted restorative justice. I make them feel bad by being really, really nice and understanding.'

'I can sympathise with anyone to whom you might do that'

'I love that you 'whom' in casual conversation'

Hannibal snorts.

Back at Hannibal's Baltimore home Will pulls out a duffel bag of clothes and a box of books and other items. He's going to be here for the foreseeable future. They've had FBI protection assigned to them, or at least to the house. And Will's is too remote.

In the back of Will's mind is that if the house in Baltimore is protected then so are Mischa and Chiyoh. The dogs have once again been returned to the kennels he uses. It's ridiculous, he's had half an evening with them in almost a month.

Whilst Will unpacks into the blue green and white room Hannibal goes to make something for supper.

'Not too heavy I think, but rich and nourishing.'

'No organs Hannibal. No offal either'

'so unadventurous Will'

'I've had enough adventure thanks. I want something without tubes please, unless it's pasta. Pasta would be ok. Did you know you can get pasta shaped like body parts and organs? I thought I'd get Zeller some for Christmas'

'You are a sweet friend Will. Come down when you're ready. We'll look round the house later and see if there is anything else you'd like in here.'

On his way to the kitchen a little later Will diverts via a trip into the library. He takes ten minutes finding the copy of Alice Through the Looking Glass that he and Mischa have agreed as a way of keeping in touch. There's a short note inside

#Dear Will, Hannibal says something bad has happened. So you are coming back again. I'm sorry about that. It would be nice if you came here not just when bad things happen. Hannibal says we aren't to worry. But of course I do. When he worries he can get a bit distant. I think it's because he has had so long where there has been no one to tell he just keeps it all inside. And of course he tries to protect me from anything too difficult. Which is very sweet of him. So if he's a bit funny please understand he's not funny about you. I promise. Love, Mischa#

#hello Mischa, thank you for the note. Even if it's for a sad reason I like being here. I do miss the dogs. But I feel welcomed. More so now. I said about a surprise for Hannibal, obviously I didn't mean what's just happened, but I was more thinking of something for the New Year. That's not so far ahead and I assume you normally do something for Christmas. Hannibal mentioned he normally hosts a Christmas party. I don't want to disrupt any of that. But new year?#

he folds the note over and flattens it, puts it inside the book and squeezes the book back into the book case. He's sending notes to women in the attic, via a book in the library, oh for goodness sake what is his life even like?

Over supper both Hannibal and Will are more cheerful. I mean Beverly and Will? As if. Eww. When they're sitting in the library later on Will gets a text from Alana

Will? What is this? Why didn't you say? I thought it was you and Hannibal. To be honest I'm a bit hurt to find out like this. You should have said. Alana

He reads it and holds it up for Hannibal to see, Hannibal gets up from the chair he's been sitting in and comes to sit beside Will on the couch.

'Ok. I'm just going to say it. Fuck this shit'

'Will!'

'I know. But really, why does she always assume the worst?'

A few moments later Hannibal's cell goes, also Alana,

*Hannibal. I want to apologise. I thought there was something between you and Will and I've been rather rude about it. I realise now we've both been manipulated. By people I thought

were our friends. If you want to talk. Please do let me know. I'm sure you've seen the pictures by now. I know you read tattlecrime.com*

He reads it and groans and reaches for his tablet on the table in front of him. Tattlecrime is already tabbed and as soon as he refreshes it there's Bev and Will with some links to the most recent case stories. There's a nasty little aside about Will playing Dr Hannibal Lecter, esteemed psychiatrist, prominent member of Baltimore's social elite and wealthy bachelor.

Will looks at him 'really? That's what she's going with? Oh fucking ace'

'It does make it look less likely that this was Freddie'

'Yeah it does. So it's either a masterful play or the players being played'

'Which we could use, possibly. I doubt she'd like being manipulated very much?'

Hannibal gets another text

Hannibal, I have been sent a rather disturbing text message with some photographs. I understand this is your friend Will Graham. If you find yourself in need of a session please don't hesitate to contact me. I hope you are well. Considering. Bedelia

He holds this message up to Will, 'my psychiatrist'

'Ok. I'm going to call Jack.' He gets up and walks to the window, pulling the curtain aside he looks out over the back garden, eyes adjusting to the dark 'Hannibal, do you have a statue of a stag in your garden made from, I don't know maybe willow or something? Or am I hallucinating this?'

Hannibal comes and joins him at the window. They look at each other. 'I'll go and get a torch and put the outdoor lights on. See what Jack says'

When Will gets through to Jack, Jack starts in straight away 'ok. We've got a tree hung with things in our back garden and it's not because we've got our decorations up early for Christmas.'

'A tree? That's nice. We've got a willow stag with antlers and everything. Have you talked to any of the others? We've also got texts from Alana and Hannibal's colleague, they got sent the photos, so we're just dealing with that bit of mess. Shit I expect Alana texted Beverly too. Oh bugger. Jack can I call you back?

'Bev? Alana got sent the photos, she's a bit pissed'

'That's nice. How are you mom?

Will looks at the phone as if she's gone crazy

'What?'

'I'm just talking to my friend Alana. Can I call you back mom. She's just popped round for the evening. I'm just making us a nice big drink. Oh and apparently I'm doing an animal themed Christmas this year as I've got three foxes made from twigs and ribbon on my front door. Isn't that nice? Lets talk later. Bye'

'Jack, Bev has got foxes. Alana is with her. She's a bit unhappy. Well Bev is too, but she's had all day to get used to the idea that something is going la la. Alana'll be worse if she's the only one who didn't get any nice decorations. Oh. It looks like Jimmy has texted Hannibal, oh that's nice he got a little nest of, I think, dormice. That's very sweet. I wonder what Brian got?'

He waves a hand at Hannibal as if to say 'ring him and find out'

Hannibal looks at him as if to say 'way ahead of you cowboy' (without the cowboy bit)

'oh, Brian got, well that's a bit harder to tell, a bird of some kind. Maybe. Oh it's a blackbird. It's got a gold foil beak. That's very pretty..... Jack'

'What is it Will?'

'Welcome to the inside of my brain on a better day'

.....

There's a lot of mutual sighing. Despite the hour all of the science team, Jack and Bella, and Hannibal all have to have evidence teams come to their homes to look for any sign of trace or anything useful. Once the recovery team has arrived at Hannibal's they both depart. Whilst waiting Hannibal and Will made the executive decision to go to Beverly's, if Alana is still there maybe they can help calm her down.

When they arrive they knock at the door, Beverly opens it looking severely pissed off.

'Too late. Alana's gone. I didn't slap her, but it was a close run thing. Come in. You can join in the all round sense of humour failure. The guys have finished the scene, here look at my pretty foxes.

She shows them a large evidence box, inside are three willow fox cubs, they're lovely in a slightly creepy way. One of them has a little pouch hanging from its neck.

'Have you opened the bag?'

'Not. They're going to do it back at the lab. What did you have?'

'A stag, about half life size, also with a pouch around the neck. At Hannibal's house not mine. Ok. I wonder if there's anything out at Wolf Trap?'

'We could go and look if you like. Looks like the night is properly fucked anyhow'

'Beverly, would you like me to call Alana, see if I can iron things out at all?'

'Have at it, Dr L. I've had enough of her being a pouty princess today. Gods sometimes she just doesn't get it. Here we are getting weirdo totem animals in our backyards and fucking photos on tattlecrime and she's a bit upset about something she ..... aww fuck it. Now I'm just being a bitch.'

Hannibal pulls his cell phone out of his jacket pocket and goes out into the kitchen. Will can hear him although he closes both doors when he leaves the room.

In the living room there are a couple of techs that Will has met before, Jimmy is also sitting on the couch. He sketches a wave at Will. Will gingerly lowers himself onto Vlad the couch, beside him, Hannibal comes back from the kitchen and sensibly takes an upright chair. They look at him expectantly.

He's got the look on his face where his nose sort of pinches in, sort of the opposite of flaring your nostrils. Will has tried to do it, he's practised in front of the mirror and everything but he can't do it. Weird.

'That didn't go as well as I might have hoped.'

'Come on, you might as well tell us'

'I believe the words 'lovesick fool', 'blinded by fondness' and 'manipulative scheming bitch' all featured in her comments. They didn't constitute an argument. I think rather she is casting around blindly for...'

'Hannibal, she's being a pouty princess bitch queen from hell'

'Broadly speaking, yes.'

The two teach guys apologise to Bev again for messing with her night. She waves them off and takes their mugs into the kitchen.

'What did Brian get, Will?'

'A blackbird. Jack and Bella got a tree.'

'Super. What does any of it mean?'

'I am still convinced the photos and texts and the protection gifts are the work of two different people or groups of people.'

'Wow Hannibal. That's escalated fast. Why groups?'

'The ornaments may have needed two people to manage them, the photos could be the work of one person it's true.'

'Ok. I thought you meant like a big group like "the Whicker Man" or something.' Bev stops for a moment. 'Ok. Now I've freaked myself out. Damn.'

'Is your room mate not here?'

'No she's off on some work field trip. She won't be back for a week or maybe ten days'

'Are they giving you protection?'

'Jack said he's arranged for the local PD to drop by every hour.'

No one says anything to that, everyone knowing how ineffective that is likely to be.

'Bev, you and Brian should come and stay with me. I'll call him now, Will, you're not staying at Wolf Trap are you?'

'No Hannibal's house in Baltimore'

'Alright then. That's sounds good. What was the animal at Wolf Trap or do you not get one as you had the chalk marks?'

'I think it's possible I left before it arrived. We were just saying as we came in maybe we should go and look?'

'I'm beginning to feel like I'm in an episode of Scooby Doo. You know, where at the end the culprit is revealed as someone utterly unexpected and says "and I'd have got away with it if it wasn't for those pesky kids"'

'If this is Scooby Doo, I'm definitely Velma'

Hannibal looks utterly mystified.

'America children's cartoon from the 70s and 80s. There's a sort of talking dog. It's very good'

'Will, it has a talking dog? Why am I unsurprised that you like it?'

'So. Are we going to Wolf Trap?'

They are about to debate this further when the doorbell rings. Perhaps unsurprisingly it is Brian.

'Hey. Come on in. We're about to go on a Scooby Doo trip to Will's house.'

'Oh. Ok. I get it. Is Jimmy Velma?'

'How did you know that?'

'It's obvious. Will's Shaggy, Bev is Daphne, and I'm Fred'

'Wow. Who knew? That's a good fit.'

'Wolf Trap then?'

In the end they take three cars, the Bentley, and Jimmy's and Brian's. Bev packs a bag and slings it in the trunk of the Bentley. She looks at her lab colleagues 'you're kidding right? It's a fucking Bentley.'

When they arrive at Wolf Trap they park the three cars in a line, ready to leave again, if need be in a hurry. Although it's dark one of the techs must have left a porch light on as the front door is illuminated. Sitting in front of it with its head thrown back is a slightly smaller than life size willow woven Wolf. They all get out of the cars and stand together looking at it

'I feel like we're missing something really important.'

'Sleep'

'Apart from sleep Bev. Will can you do the wizzy thing?'

Will raises his eyebrows. 'The wizzy thing? I don't know. It's not a victim or a body. It's not psychic emanations that I pick up. But I can try, Hannibal?'

Hannibal looks at Will and thoughtfully sucks his bottom lip, he nods shortly.

Will walks towards the steps of the porch. He closes his eyes. Instantly he can see himself seated with others in a circle in the woods near by. There's a natural amphitheater with a large tree where a stage might be. In his mind's eye what he sees is an owl sitting in the tree. All around him are different animals and birds. He looks down at himself, he's not a human any more. All he can see is his long shaggy pelt. He opens his mouth to speak but it's a growl. He is the Wolf. The shock of it brings him back, gasping and choking.

'It's the parliament of animals. They are totems. I don't know why but that's what it is. That's what we are. We represent their qualities. I think I might throw up. I could see the world through smell. That was seriously weird.' He takes some deep breaths. Bev stands beside him and rubs little circles on the top of his back. 'Thanks. Ok. Coming back now. Phew.'

'Ok, well that's a start. Is it a First Nation's story? It rings a really faint bell'

'I think I did it in anthropology 101, you know Propp and 'the Morphology of the Folk Tale'?'

'Right. So that's what we need to look at tomorrow. I think we now know we've got parallel, unrelated cases, except they may have overlapped. I wonder if whoever did the chalk marks saw who took the photos?'

'If they did, I'm not sure I'd want to be that person. Mr/Ms Animal Rights is pretty dedicated, to something!'

'Oh god. It is the Whicker Man!'

'Shut up Bev. No it's not. We're fine. Aren't we?'

Brian does his best impression of Scooby Doo 'wriydunno'

'Was that "I don't know" in Scooby?'

'Maybe'

'Oh good grief.'

'Can we go now? Will I love your house but it's dark, it's creepy out, and there are friendly weirdos looking after us. Who might be here right now. Watching out for us. At least I hope that's what they're doing.'

'Yeah. Lets go. I'll ring the tech guys again and tell them about the Wolf. Do you know the place I saw them in does actually exist in the wood. Over there.' He gestures off to the woods near the back of the property.

'We're not going there now! Have none of you even seen 'the Blair Witch Project'? I was freaking at 'the Cabin in the Woods, which is almost what Will's house is, but that's ridiculous.'

'Yeah. Ok. Fair point. Tomorrow then?'

I was only waiting

Chapter Summary

> Hannibal meets with multiple people, and Freddie might have just a teeny crush on him! Abigail machinates. An anthropologist cogitates. And it's all still a bit peculiar. Set beteeen lost boys and angel maker, because apparently I couldn't leave well enough alone!

So, Dr Lecter. It's nice of you to see me. Thank you.'

'You're very welcome Ms Lounds, may I offer you some tea? Or coffee if you'd prefer?'

'That's nice of you'

'Not at all, would you prefer to stay here, or would you be content to come into the kitchen?'

'Oh, kitchen is fine, no need to be so formal after all'

In the kitchen Freddie looks round at the various pieces of art. On one wall there is a rather nice print of a koi carp. It's placed so you can see it whenever you preparing anything at the main island. It doesn't quite fit with the rest of the decor. Though it's not completely out of keeping.

'I like the koi. Is it an original?'

'It is very pleasing. It was a gift from Will.'

'Really? So you'd say you're close then? Even after the photographs?'

'I thought they were rather sweet, didn't you?'

'How do you mean?'

'Haven't you wanted to have a friend in whom you can confide, who wants to spend time with you, is willing to see you at your best and at your worst, who can not only cope with your idiosyncrasies, but enjoy them, who likes the same things and different things?'

'I suppose. Maybe'

'And wouldn't that be nice to have as an adult, not just as a child? I think Will is rather lucky to have that with Ms Katz. It's not that often we get the chance for true friendship. If I wasn't similarly blessed I might feel rather envious.'

'So, you're not cross about them then?'

'I'm sorry that they've been taken out of context and that somebody was hoping to manipulate you by so doing.'

'Manipulate me?'

'Why yes. I know you didn't take them. So I can only suppose someone sent them to you in the interests of seeing you fall out with either Jack Crawford, or indeed members of the FBI science team. Or even me or some of my colleagues. I rather regret how they've perverted your normal quest for the truths some of us might prefer to ignore.'

'What do you mean?'

'You're very good at what you do. It's fascinating. Someone clearly understands the extent to which you influence events. So they've co-opted you and your fascinating website to their own agenda. Whatever that might be. I can't imagine you want to compromise relationships that might be useful to you, so I can only hope that who ever is responsible will go no further.'

'Did you get sent them too?'

'I suspect that a number of people were sent them in a rather scatter gun attempt to inflict as much damage as possible. I know for sure that isn't you.'

'How do you know?'

'Ms Lounds, you're exceptionally strategic in your approaches. You wouldn't steal your own thunder. Far better to publish first and draw attention to the images afterwards. It does make me wonder if whoever sent them to you hoped to undermine your credibility just a little. If that is so, it's something I personally rather regret.'

'That's gracious of you'

'Not at all. Life would be much duller without your penetrating analysis.'

'I thought I'd annoyed you?'

'A specific incident where I am not entirely assured of the probity of your endeavour, is not the same as a more generic dislike. Goodness me, no. I think I can say our encounters have almost entirely been productive?'

'I guess that's so. Sure. So. You're not annoyed with Dr Graham'

'With Will? Goodness no. He's very dear to me. And I am fortunate enough to enjoy his regard. Likewise Ms Katz. Who does have exceptional taste in pyjamas. Don't you think?'

'Have you seen them? Apart from the pictures?'

'Ms Lounds, what a rake you make me sound. I don't have the pleasure of such intimacies in the general run of things, but I have been fortunate enough to assist in packing a case for Ms Katz when I remarked on these. I thought that Will might like a pair, they have small dogs on them. You know he has a fondness for dogs?'

'I do', running through Freddie's head is the thought that old world and 5th language be damned Hannibal Lecter is a smooth bastard. But he's right about several things. Fuck it.

'Would you like a second cup? And do have a biscuit. I made them earlier. Now. I wanted to ask you about something else entirely. Do you mind if I run a few things by you, to get your take as it were?'

.....

When Will gets up and goes downstairs he finds a note on the kitchen table

#Dear Will, Ms Lounds will be here at approximately 11.15, you may wish not to be! I have a small plan which I am currently executing. I am reasonably confident in its efficacy. There are some items staying warm for you in the top oven. Today is my early day for patients. I was reluctant to wake you. You snore very delicately. So I was convinced you were asleep. I believe you will be in the lab this morning? This afternoon I am having tea with Alana (wish me luck). Let me know of any developments. Warmly, Hannibal#

Will grins. Executing a small plan? I bet he fucking is, he thinks. He goes into the library and nearly jumps out of his skin because Mischa is hiding behind the door.

'Hello Will. Are you alright? Did I scare you? I am sorry. Tell me what's happening. We had a lovely stag in the garden yesterday, but those FBI men took it away. It was very pretty. Do you know why it was here. Hannibal said you all had animals. What was yours?'

'Hello Mischa. It was a Wolf. When did you get a chance to see Hannibal. Oh. Really horribly early this morning?'

'Yes. He has slots very early twice a week for people who have normal office hours. He prefers earlier to lates. I knew you must be special because he gave you a late'

'Yes he did. Well. That was very kind of him. How are you?'

'I'm quite well thank you. You are going to tell me about the surprise aren't you?'

'Surprise? Oh yes. Sorry. For Hannibal. Ok. I think I said I imagined you have plans for Christmas'

Mischa smiles, she does but probably not quite what Will thinks

'So, I thought maybe we could make some kind of arrangement work for New Year's Eve? Do you stay here?'

'Sometimes. But usually we go to Chiyoh's cabin. It's lovely in the winter, we have the hibachi for tea, and the irori is often alight. It's very soothing. And of course Chiyoh and

Hannibal have many friends there.'

'And you?'

'I'm making friends there. When I first arrived, I was a little timid. But I've got to know some nice people, Indigo is nice. Do you know her?'

'I only met her to collect the linen. She looks after the cabin doesn't she?'

'That's right. When Chiyoh's not there. I think she's a little sweet on Chiyoh. But I don't like to ask'

'So it's only your brother's affairs you try to gently steer?' He smiles as he says it and is pleased when she laughs, a little tinkly sound.

'That's fair. Only Hannibal's. Never before though. But I haven't been here for that long'

'Mischa, where were you before you were here?'

'I was in Lithuania. Where we grew up. It was a sad time. I did something very wrong a long time ago. So I had to stay there. As soon as they let me I was permitted to come and join Hannibal. As long as he looks after me, I'm allowed to stay. I'm very lucky. He looks after me very well.'

'I'm sorry. Mischa, that must have been painful being separated like that.'

'It was. But I'm here now. So I must be grateful for that.'

'That's an admirable attitude. I admire you for it'

'Oh. Do you think so? Thank you'

She flushes with pleasure and she looks so like Hannibal his heart skips a little.

'You're very like him sometimes.'

'Oh that's a lovely thing to say.'

From upstairs they hear a door close and some steps on the landing above. Mischa and Will exchange looks. He finds himself hiding in the curtains the way Mischa had done previously.

'Mischa? Are you in here? Here you are? You must be more careful. I don't know if Dr Graham has left yet. You know what Hannibal-San said.'

'Of course Chiyoh, can we get some biscuits. I know Hannibal made some spare. He's got a visitor later.'

'Yes certainly, but we must be quick'

In the curtain Will thinks I'm hiding in the fucking curtains in my boyfriend's library. My dad is going to love this when I tell him. What am I even doing?

.....

Around about lunchtime Freddie Lounds drives up to Port Haven, it's the facility where Abigail Hobbs has been staying all the time she's in sort of semi-protective custody. They have a meeting planned to talk about the case so far and what if anything Abigail might want to say about it, either on the website or in a book, ghost written by Freddie.

Freddie is a little bit pissed off with Abigail and her cousin Em, and he's another smooth bastard too she thinks. Freddie would die before she revealed a source. Well, probably. She's never had to actually put that to the test, oh and she did dob Graham in with the mushroom guy, but really sources matter.

Of course it was Abigail who sent the pictures. She'd sent a good little cover note with them too. It was Em who actually took them. And Freddie liked the angle. But now she's talked to Hannibal Lecter she can see she's been played. Little fucker, Abigail, not Hannibal. And isn't he a charmer? As well as a smooth bastard. Hmm. Yeah. Lets keep that little thought well tucked away Lounds.

Abigail says she's got other photos of the team and their hangers on. She makes it sound like there's an orgy of visual delights. So. Freddie is willing to see what's she got to say for herself. Oh she'll play it straight, no point in tipping her hand is there?

.....

As Will is leaving the house in Baltimore he happens to look up at the eaves that jut out over the entrance way. There are chalked symbols there. He takes some pictures goes back indoors and then phones Hannibal, it's his answering service

'Hey. Sorry not to get you. Guess what? we've got pretties on the porch at your house? I'm going to have to call Jack. Shall I wait until you get back and then push off?'

Next he calls Jack, who unusually is still at home.

'Hang on Will, I'll go and look.' Will can hear the sound of heavy footsteps as Jack stomps down his hallway 'ok nothing at the back door, I'll try the front now' more footsteps 'oh. Ok. Yeah. Front door. What is that? Ok call it in, call the others.'

'They're all at Jimmy's'

'Ok. Call Jimmy then. Please'

Wow thinks Will, he must really be fed up 'sure Jack, on it, do you want me to call you back or just Text?'

'Text is fine Will. Thanks'

Who are you and what have you done with Jack Crawford? Oh. Maybe the Miriam Lass anniversary is coming up soon. Shit. That's a bit tough. Jack is always a bit odd around then apparently. Will calls Jimmy

'Hey, it's Will. Can you do me a favour and go and look at your front door?'

'Yeah. Ok. Is this another surprise?'

'Just take a look'

'Oh? Ok. Oh. What is that?'

'Take a picture Jimmy. I'll be in the lab as soon as I can. I'm waiting for the techs to arrive in Baltimore and then Hannibal is due back at about 11.15. I should be there a bit before one. See you later yeah?'

Eventually the techs finish at Hannibal's house and Will is about to leave when he thinks to leave a note for Mischa explaining what is happening.

#dear Mischa, the FBI people came back to check some things to do with the stag. They've gone again now. It should be fine. Hannibal will be back soon. I'll make sure I fill him in. So New Years. Basically why don't we say what ever else happens between now and then that I'll come up on the 31st. Like a first footer? For Hogmanay? I've got a Scottish family somewhere further back - I guess Graham is a give away. It's a tradition to bring coal, so I could do that too. Will#

.....

Later in the lab the group is looking at the blown up images of the signs, sigils and symbols from Will's porch and from everyone else's front doors and entrance ways.

Many of the symbols repeat across everyone's personal set. Perhaps not surprisingly the sets with the biggest overlap overall are Will's and Hannibal's, now that Will is staying in the Baltimore house.

They've brought someone up from the Smithsonian in Washington, an old friend of Jimmy's, an anthropologist named Linda Crowwater to look at the images and to give a view on the contents of the protection amulets or Gris Gris. She also knows a fair amount about indigenous traditions and folk tales. She's part 'Plains Indian' with links to other people who might know more if they need it.

'So I've had a look, thank you to everyone for being so cooperative, sometimes these things depend on you having all the bits of the jigsaw, so to speak. What we've got here is a mixture of Hobo alphabet, semaphore symbols I think, and a simple substitution code. There are some random symbols thrown in as punctuation or to indicate a repeat of a particular bit'

Dr Crowwater goes on to explain the picture that she sees emerging, that the team (expanded to include Hannibal), is being offered protection in exchange for extending their protection. It seems it's also an invitation. To what or where or when is less clear. She's rather excited by it all. She's almost rubbing her hands when she catches Jimmy's eye and he just minutely shakes his head.

'This is a wonderful example of syncretism. It's very unusual for someone, or several someones to be drawn into a protection circle. It may be that the existing circle has recently lost some members, or that they are trying to create a new one. Have any of you had contact with an. Isolated , or remote, or discrete community? One or all of you?' There are sort of shrugs when Brian says

'We did sort of have Thanksgiving Dinner in a remote diner with thirty people we didn't really know up in the blue ridge mountains. One of our colleagues was temporality lost, Will do you want to explain?'

'Sure Z, I wasn't very well, and was sleepwalking. Two men sort of recused me, an elderly man and his son, bit older than me, and well, they looked after me for a couple of days. They were very kind really. There was a stag. Actually there were lots of animals. It's a bit hard to explain, it's possible they may have slightly drugged me? I've no idea where I was. When I came back they blindfolded me and led me through a wood, I could feel pine needle carpeting under my feet. I'm not sure I'd even be able to find them again. It was a peculiar couple of days. And the animals, well, that should have occurred to me straight away. Sorry.'

'I guess what I want to know is what usually happens if this is an invitation?'

'A parliament of all the animals is usually called by the leader of the parliament and new members are called and tested for their attributes. To see if they will fit the gap. It's very unusual for there to be more than one gap, and often more than one person is called as a sort of audition. But this is exceptional. It looks like you've already been assigned roles, the totem animals as you demonstrate those qualities so well. It's why I think it might be a new parliament.'

'So when you say parliament of the animals it is actually people who represent the animals?'

'Yes and no, there is an element of shamanism involved too, so you take on those aspects of the animal to complement what you have of them too.'

'When you've been assigned the totem, there's usually some kind of task that you have to carry out, a sort of test. Jimmy said there are amulets? Lets get each one lined up with the right totem.'

Over the next two hours Dr Crowwater goes through each animal, its significance and totemic qualities and what the contents of the amulets mean. Towards the end the team is a bit bemused by the whole thing. I mean this is the 21st century post-fact society.

'I suppose, what I'd like to know is what happens now, and what happens if one or more than one of us fail? Or we can't live up to the roles assigned to us? And how do we communicate back? Send them a signal or something?'

'These are excellent questions' says the veteran anthropologist, 'I'm afraid to say I have no clue! That usually depends on the parliament! I can ask a few people who specialise in this area. More than me even. We're talking about a fascinating remnant.'

When the doctor has gone Bev says 'I don't mind, just as long as none of us end up as a remnant!' She's captured the feelings of all of them. Even Will is feeling just faintly uneasy about it.

'Ok, so we can at least now definitely separate this off from the photos can't we?'

'Except this might have occurred in response to the person taking the photos on Wills porch not necessarily the photos themselves.'

It's a moot point. Will remembers that Hannibal texted him after seeing Freddie 'sorry, sorry I meant to say this while Linda was here. Hannibal spoke to Freddie Lounds ill give you the gist of it * dear Will, yada yada, ms Lounds was sent the photographs. She is now rather irritated. It may be no coincidence that she is now at Port Haven. I asked one of the nurses to let Alana know if she arrived. And she has, and in turn Alana has been kind enough to let me know. We're now having tea. And what an... ok folks you don't need to know the rest of what he says...

.....

'Dear Alana, I'm so glad you have been able to come for tea. Please do tell me about the reasons for your upset? Do you know who sent you the pictures?'

'Does that really matter Hannibal? Beverly has effectively deceived me. Will has deceived you, and possibly me, well perhaps not me, but certainly you. I can't understand why you're not more upset? I blame Beverly.'

'I don't believe I've been deceived Alana. And surely you see that whoever sent the photographs must be of significance. After all what did they hope to achieve by acting in this way? Who did they hope to upset perhaps? Might we consider those questions?'

' I suppose so, so who is affected by it?'

'Well you, obviously, Beverly and Will certainly, me, though not as intended maybe, Ms Lounds as she feel manipulated. Jack as it has called into question relationships within the team and outwith. Some of my friends, colleagues and even patients as well as acquaintances who fear I have been either duped or to use your words betrayed or worse.' He smiles at this though Alana doesn't notice, he continues 'Dr Price and Dr Zeller who may feel jealous or marginalised or likewise deceived. Shall I go on?'

'Alright then, I take your point.'

'Alana, might I ask something gently?' 'Alright. Go on.' 'I'd understood that you were less inclined to pursue a relationship with Will now, after, well, after the events of the last two months. But you seem very upset. Is that not so?'

'Well that's true. But actually it did occur to me that if Will is keeping an open book as it were, it might be something he and I could discuss, in an open and adult way, with no one influencing him' she directs a pointed look at Hannibal, who raises his pale eyebrows, 'I mean, from what you are saying it doesn't sound like you're too attached, if these pictures

don't bother you. So maybe it would be good for Will to understand the options still open to him. Don't you think? As his friend?'

'You think I am inconstant in my affections for Will? Or sit lightly to them?

'Well, you're not actually married Hannibal! He is allowed to see who he wants. Really? Are you even dating exclusively? Will spends a lot of his spare time with the science team. Maybe he's less committed or even into it than you think?'

'Alana, I think you would do well to understand that as far as Will is concerned I am both committed and certain of my own regard. Of course I cannot and should not speak for Will. You must ask him. But if he is as clear as I am, I hope you will respect that?'

'Of course Hannibal. But until then, well you know what they say?'

'Yes?'

'All's fair in love and war!'

'I am still not under the impression that this is a contest'

'If you don't know you're playing a game it's much harder to win.' She smiles at him. He doesn't return it. 'Can I ask you about Abigail, Hannibal? When I saw her earlier she said she'd like to talk to you. Would you be willing?'

Tbc. (Yeah I know, but I drafted it in long hand and it's taking ages to type up, my bad, sorry)

For this moment

Chapter Summary

A dance a dinner another dance. And cameo by Franklyn all boundless bounce. Alana, some more.

When Freddie came away from Port Haven she had much to think about. Abigail's cousin Em had been rather busy - he's got photos of almost the whole team: Jimmy and Brian in jimmy's kitchen canoodling, Jack waiting for Bella at an oncology appointment, Bev and Alana clearly having an argument in Bev's front room, the good doctor himself dancing with or embracing a tall blonde woman in what she thinks she recognises as the doctor's living room at his home in Baltimore. As Freddie looks through them the only ones she thinks might be useful right away are the ones with Alana Bloom and Beverly Katz, and Dr Lecter and the anonymous blonde woman. But what is the point really?

She could use the ones of Hannibal as a sort of extension of the Will and Bev story, 'dr Hannibal Lecter apparently not concerned by his betrayal ensuring the grass doesn't grow under his feet etc etc . But so what? She thinks it got be more useful leverage with Will Graham for something, or maybe turn them back on Abigail herself? Of course Abigail might use them directly with Dr Lecter, or Will Graham. But she could earn herself some extra credit with Hannibal Lecter, maybe? She fishes out the card he gave her, taps her nose with it, ok lets try this then

dr Lecter, thank you for seeing me this morning. I thought it might be useful for you to know that I was offered photos of you today taken at your home. You are pictured with a fair haired woman in a rather intimate embrace. I've no interest in using them. But you've dealt fairly with me recently so I thought I'd let you know

When Hannibal reads this he experiences a moment of combined fury and something deeper and more potent. Freddie has let him know that she has such photos and could use them, but more significantly he sees that Abigail has once again manipulated Freddie and is endeavouring to threaten him.

She's very skilled. If he wasn't more annoyed, and had less to lose, he might even go so far as to say he is impressed. He is due to meet with her tomorrow. He will have to think about his strategy before then. Right this moment he probably doesn't need to worry. Hopefully. (And won't that thought prove to be utterly mistaken? He will later note)

.....

At Port Haven Abigail has been refreshing the tab on her phone every minute or so waiting to see the pictures land on tattlecrime.com. She's a little surprised when they don't appear. Ok

Freddie's playing a different game. She can respect that. So who might they annoy the most or rather, who might they hurt? Especially the one of the doctor with some woman. Abigail hunts through her purse until she finds the card Will Graham gave her not long after she woke up, after he killed her dad. She doesn't want to send them. Actually maybe she can use them without showing them to him yet? Coerce him? Blackmail him so that he does get to see them? Hmm.

'Dr Graham, hello, it's Abigail Hobbs. I'm sorry to bother you. Thank you. I'm alright. I know. I was lucky. Thank you. I know Em behaved a bit badly I'm really sorry. He gets a bit carried away. Yes. Yes. I understand. I wanted to ask you if you'd come and visit? No, I haven't heard anything about Nick. Oh. Ok. I am very sorry about that too. I panicked. So. Will you come. Oh ok. I'll ask her. No I'm sure she'll be ok, but yes of course. I'll let you know. Or she will. Ok. Thanks Dr Graham, sorry, thanks Will. Bye.'

Will frowns at his phone. What is Abigail's angle here? Maybe if he gets a chance he'll talk it over with Alana and Hannibal. Oh yeah that'd be a hoot at present. He glances down at his phone again. 4:20 pm. He's got an hour before he needs to get changed and go into Baltimore to meet Hannibal for this dinner Hannibal is getting some award at. Will is his plus one. Hannibal asked rather diffidently if he'd come, and might have been surprised when Will didn't put up even a token fight. After all, he'd have to meet Hannibal's friends at some point, might as well do it bit by bit rather than all at once. Will gives a little shudder at that thought.

He goes in search of a spare lap top in the lab and immerses himself in folk lore and legend. When he looks at his phone again it's 5:45 pm. Shit he'll have to get a move on. He grabs his suit from where it's been hanging in the lab tech's office and pulls out his wash/shave kit from his assigned locker. In the lab showers he washes and then dries his hair, shit it's a bit long, he should have had it cut. He shaves carefully, twice. He ties his bow tie and does up his nicest dark shoes. He's had his tux refinished and bought a nicer than usual new shirt. He thinks he looks pretty good. When he walks through the lab the team whistle him.

'Don't you scrub up well?'

'Do you think so? Is it really ok?'

'You look great Will. You need to do something with your hair though'

'I could put it up for you?'

'What, like a hipster man bun thing? Really Bev'

'I think you could really work it'

'Are you sure, Hannibal is getting an award. I don't want to look like a dick'

'You won't look like a dick, you'll look lush. 5 minutes!'

Will momentarily closes his eyes, and then thinks why the hell not. In the scale of things a man bun doesn't even make it into his top twenty of shocking things he's done in the last month. I mean really?

'Ok, Bev. Go for it.'

She rummages in her bags and pulls out a clip in the shake of a fish.

'Did you plan this?'

' if I'd planned it it'd be in the shape of a dog.'

'Oh yeah, fair point'

When Will leaves the lab Zeller says

'Does he really not know what he looks like?'

'Nope not a clue. Hannibal doesn't stand a chance'

'He looks good enough to eat'

'He does, he still has to get through the whole photograph walk of shame though'

'Oh yeah, that. Hmm. Not so much'

They grimace at each other.

.....

Reckoning on them having tight schedules Will and Hannibal have arranged to meet at the hall where the dinner is being held. Hannibal's table consists mainly of medics, other psychiatric colleagues and their partners. Dr Du Maurier has partnered with Dr Sutcliffe, who is Will's regular physician, they're old friends from college days, Dr Chilton has brought his boyfriend, a post-doc at GW. Alana has brought a colleague from her department (the first time Hannibal has ever been unavailable to accompany her) and Dr and Mrs Franks are both attending too. Normally this is an event Hannibal would enjoy even if the food was poor. But the afternoon with Alana and the text from Bedelia which he had only had time to respond to with a holding message suggests it might not be totally smooth sailing. When he arrives he sees a number of acquaintances, friends, one or two, no three patients, and two former patients and at least one other colleague with whom he has a rather strained relationship (a referral that wasn't as straight forward as it might have been).

Will it seems isn't here yet. Hannibal sincerely hopes he hasn't forgotten. This is the first event they are attending together. Together. Hannibal was surprised that he'd agreed so readily. And although both of the current cases will be claiming some of his time as far as Hannibal knows Will hasn't actually been called away somewhere. Hannibal takes out his cell. Nothing. The dining room is beginning to fill up.

Several people come over to greet Hannibal, seemingly to congratulate him on the award, and enquire after his health, but really they're trying to ascertain just how annoyed or upset he might really be. He is just beginning to think that Will has either forgotten or will actually be late when Hannibal see him over at the door. He's talking and laughing with someone there. Hannibal has time to watch him cross the room, smile hello to one or two people he seems to

know. This includes someone Hannibal knows from the Baltimore Opera. How peculiar that Will should know them too.

Hannibal is rather overcome by just how lovely Will looks like this. It's a far cry from the pictures on tattle crime, his lithe form, his lovely face and oh, what has he done with his hair? Hannibal has a moment when his mouth dries up entirely, he experiences such a rush of heat to his cock that he has to swallow hard and take a sharp breath not to be completely thrown by it. He can imagine undoing the clip later, loosening Will's hair, taking off his glasses.. Hannibal forces himself away from the image otherwise held find himself dragging Will into the rather badly soundproofed rest rooms at the convention centre.

Will sits down next to Hannibal smiles at him and squeezes his thigh briefly. Hannibal has to swallow again. He doesn't quite yet trust his voice.

On Will's other side is Alana's colleague. He seems perfectly pleasant and Will can always find something to talk about to pretty well anyone. Next to Hannibal sits Bedelia Du Maurier. She leans over and says

'It seems the photographs are poorly timed in relation to this event. Or do you believe it intentional. I hope you will both manage to get through the evening. You seem a little affected.'

Hannibal is still trying to work out if he has a voice at all. Or that he has one that he can use in company. This is going to be one hell of an evening. Nevertheless Will is friendly especially when he is introduced to Bedelia and Dr Franks

'Oh yes, you were in that nice bar that evening..'

'When you were assaulted? What came of that?'

'Oh. Right. Yeah. He got community service. Nothing major. Really a slap on the wrist. But it goes on his record. Took half a morning in court. Not awful as these things go. For him either.'

Dr Franks asks

' are you a little susceptible to situations of this kind?'

Will heart sinks. Oh of course the photographs. Really? Here? He has a moment of wondering how many people have seen it on tattlecrime.com or if anyone was sent them specifically. His own doctor is there with Dr Du Maurier, she did get them,

'Hey Donald, nice to see you when I'm not unwell. How are you?'

Hannibal has finally got a handle on talking again and when Donald and Will have finished exchanging pleasantries he asks Will about the case.

'Oh. It's some complicated ritual thing. We've got a friend of Jimmy's up from the Smithsonian looking at it. I'll tell you the detail later. What I want to know is how (he drops his voice low) did it go with Alana?'

Hannibal debates for a moment 'it was rather challenging. I think she was annoyed that I was not more annoyed.'

'Really? Can't she get her head round Bev and I just being friends?'

'She may be feeling somewhat supplanted.'

'Oh. Right. Yes. I understand that. Maybe I should make more of an effort to have her included in things.'

Hannibal pauses, that isn't quite what he intended. But he's not a totally selfish man, and Alana seeing more of Will may actually be of benefit, he will be reminded of how stubborn she can be. In the way of polite dinners they don't speak with one another for the remainder of the course. When next they chance to speak together Will has had a slightly difficult conversation with Alana. Likewise a Bedelia. Looking around Will sees that he's getting a few comments and looks from other tables. He grits his teeth, but he smiles and carries on being friendly. This is Hannibal's evening after all and he won't ruin it.

Dr Chilton makes a few cutting remarks and Will neatly deflects them. When Chilton's boyfriend plain up and asks about Beverly Hannibal interjects with a mildly withering remark which he thinks he has slightly misjudged. He taps the table top lightly.

'I apologise, I find I am already bored of defending my lack of concern, when I am repeatedly asked if I am concerned. Surely it is enough for me to say I am not. At least to my friends. Will? Would you like to add anything?'

Will smiles at him, he recognises the point beyond which it is never advisable to push Hannibal. 'Short of getting Freddie to print a rebuttal I'm not sure what either Hannibal and I could do to change people's minds. People believe what they want to believe? Though why I would want to cheat on Hannibal is beyond me. Even for cute pyjamas' he smiles again to make his words humorous rather than brittle.

The table as a whole laugh, even Alana. It's good timing as others at nearby tables pick up the laughter and there's a ripple of shifting views across the room.

After the meal Hannibal is one of five recipients of an award. When he gets up he briefly squeezes Will's shoulder who gets in an arm squeeze of his own. Hannibal says a few careful gracious words and returns to the table. When he sits Will leans over and kisses him briefly. They smile at one another. Anyone who happened to be looking would be in no doubt of the state of their relationship. Unless you're Alana.

The evening moves into dancing, both of them dance regularly. The willingness of any man to actually dance and dance competently being greatly valued by those who would otherwise find themselves widows on the dance floor.

Will dances with Alana, she makes a few comments about the photos which Will feels he hits into the long grass. He dances with Bedelia who is fairly forthright with him

'So Dr Graham, I'm pleased to finally meet you. Rather than have impressions of you filtered through either Hannibal or the medium of text message or even image.'

'Yes, Hannibal told me you were sent them directly. I'm sorry. I hope your number hasn't been too widely circulated as a result?'

'So do I',

'I'm sure Hannibal will reflect on the photos or at least the effect of their distribution. The timing's a bit rubbish with this evening, but maybe it's not so bad as we have the opportunity to present a united front'

'And does that matter to you'

'In as far as it effects Hannibal's happiness, yes'

'And yours?'

'Mine's pretty good thanks. Apart from the effects of of atypical neurology and a headache I can't shift at present. One of those though I am used to.'

'I understand you be been called to some stressful cases recently?'

'Yes. That's much less enjoyable.'

'Evil minds often are'

'Not my first choice for a name for that museum'

'You dance well'

'Thanks. I enjoy it. You too. Where did you learn?'

The rest of the dance they pass in trivialities. At the end Will effectively passes partners down a line as Hannibal and Dr Franks also make an exchange. Will dances with Mrs Franks who has a rather robust attitude to the pictures

'you were having a sleepover with a friend. I wish I had friends like that. And those pyjamas are excellent. I like your hair. You look quite different. You scrub up awfully well. You and Hannibal make a handsome couple. You might even lighten him up. He used to be more fun. He's got serious the last few years.'

Will is about to say that they're not yet exactly a couple but he decides it's better to say nothing. Denying Hannibal won't help anyone this evening. It's clear that the last of the evening is approaching as the dances slow. Will is nabbed by Alana again and Will is polite with her. She's a little more clingy than he's comfortable with and he murmurs something to that effect. She responds by laughing and squeezing him. Will slightly frowns. 'Oh you're so funny Will'

Hannibal has been sitting this dance out and sees the exchange. His facial expression doesn't change but he recognises a gauntlet when one is thrown down. Even if he doesn't want to dignify the game by acknowledging that Alana thinks there is one.

He does however get to dance with Will for the last two dances of the evening. They relax in relief with each other. Both laughing, telling each other of the various things that have been said. When they return to the table Will doesn't let go of Hannibal's hand and Hannibal allows himself to be led. (A declaration of war if Alana wants it)

For a final round of drinks Hannibal sits with his arm resting along the back of Will's chair, which Will leans back into.

'Content?'

'Not bad, you?'

'The same'

'Ok to kiss you here?'

'A little.'

'Good'

Will makes good on what he's just said. Sweet and heated. Will whispers quietly in Hannibal's ear 'you turn me on so much' Hannibal doesn't say anything but he radiates pleasedness. It leaves both of them a little flustered. Hannibal stands to go and retrieve their coats and some of his sense of where he begins and ends, harder to tell now that Will is, well, just is.

When he returns to the table a few minutes later, a small number of conversations held and questions asked and answered, there is an argument going on at the table. Will is sitting looking miserable as one of the wait staff is arguing with Dr Du Maurier.

As Hannibal approaches he sees it is Matthew Brown dressed as all the other wait staff are. Hannibal asks Dr Sutcliffe what has happened. It's a bit confused but it involved Matthew Brown approaching Will somewhat aggressively, Will was clearly disconcerted by what he said and reacted badly. Alana has her arm round him which Hannibal thinks might not actually be helping.

'Mr Brown, it seems we are not destined to have a satisfactory encounter. I'm not sure I'm clear why you're here.'

'Just for the pay and perks doc. Some of us need to make it where we can. Can't all be old money or,' and he blatantly directs this at Will 'have rich boyfriends.' Hannibal frowns and Matthew has the sense not to extend this further and slopes off. Will extracts himself from Alana with some difficulty and Hannibal wraps his coat round him.

'Alright?'

'Yes. Lets just go. You ok?'

'I am. Though I am sorry the evening ended in this trying fashion'

'Nah, I'm ok. It just threw me a bit, it was a good evening. I'm glad I was able to come. Nice ornament too!'

'I wondered when you'd get to that'

'What do you think it is exactly?'

'Exactly? I couldn't say. I think it is the spirit of endeavour as represented by something made from a synthetic substance to express the enterprise of humanity.'

'Really? You know it looks like an oversized translucent silicone dildo with extra bits?'

'I am aware, yes'

'Can I carry it? It kind of goes with the degenerate look I've been fostering recently. Heavy isn't it. What was it for? I missed that bit. What you said was nice. Where are you going to put it?'

'You are a sorry excuse for a date'

'Are we going now? Where are you going to put it Hannibal? Hannibal it's a good question'

'You're quite impossible"

'I can think of places it could go'

'We are going, now I think'

'I'm just winding you up'

'I am delighted you have recovered what passes, with you, for a sense of humour'

'You're so nice to me. Unlike Abigail's cousin, what is it with him. I mean why?'

As they're actually leaving a portly bearded man approaches Hannibal 'hello Dr Lecter, congratulations on the award. Richly deserved.'

'Thank you'

'I see you're here with fellow from the FBI' he gives Will a filthy look,

Will wants to say something like 'hello, I'm right here I can actually hear you you know.'

'I hope you know I set no store by the rumours. Most distasteful as I'm sure you're aware. Do let me know if I can be of any support.'

'Thank you Mr Froidveaux, I can assure you that won't be necessary'

'Well you kindly sat beside my bedside when I was in need, and were so supportive, and I know you're very forgiving. Well good evening'

Will side eyes Hannibal 'bedside eh?' More seriously he says 'have you been getting a lot of that?'

'I believe that is number fifteen this evening.'

'Well that's just rubbish! I'm really sorry Hannibal.'

'Don't worry Will. It could be much worse. I'll go with Oscar Wilde on this occasion'

'What? Better to be talked about that not?'

Hannibal does however make a mental note to ask some especially penetrating questions during Franklyn's next session.

In the car in the way back to his home Will's cell goes, it's Beverly

'Heya Will, put me on speaker will you?'

'Sure Bev hang on' he puts it on speaker then holds the phone up for Hannibal to hear better

'So, Dr L, Will, was it ok, did you have a nice evening guys? Cos the pictures are just great. You did actually go together didn't you?'

'Beverly, what?'

'So, brace yourselves, it's not tattlecrime.com. It's the Baltimore Sun, you know, they've got some kind of affiliate deal with tattlecrime and Freddie. Anyway there's a lot of pictures of this evening's do, both of you, dancing with an awful lot of women and A+ for stamina and maybe D- for impression it gives. None of you together though. One of Dr L looking rather annoyed next to the one of Will with Alana plastered all over him. Freddie's held off but the society pages have really gone for it. I'd say that if either of you got shit off the Tattlecrime pics this is going to be worse.

'Send me the link Bev, and thanks for the heads up.'

'No problem, oh we've already had calls here, switchboard have been told not to put any more through. You might get doorsteppers in Baltimore though.'

Hannibal and Will exchange looks. Hannibal's cell goes off, he retrieves it, unlocks it and hands it to Will, 'you're right Bev, Hannibal is starting to get calls now. Oh for fucks sake. Thanks I better go, we're nearly home.'

Despite everything Hannibal's hands clutch the steering wheel just a little tighter to hear Will refer to Hannibal's house as 'home'.

'Ok, what do you want to do? United front, all round dismay, no comment, laughter, surprise, snog on the doorstep. Your call. I've run out of fucks to give, except where it affects you'

'Possibly Ms Lounds might be prepared to print a rebuttal in exchange for something interesting, though I am reluctant to accord her any more power than she already has.'

'Ok. I'm up for it. Hey I wonder if the protection circle might have an impact on this,' Hannibal looks a question at Will 'oh yeah, I said I'd explain right..'

.....

In a slightly tired apartment Freddie Lounds is looking over the new photos. She admits it's a clever edit. But she'd have gone for something a bit different. Far better to have Dr a Lecter owe her something, yeah, now just maybe

Dr Lecter, I'm sorry. I've seen the pictures. Might I be if some assistance?

To Arrive

Chapter Summary

> Abigail Hobbs, the mistress of manipulation does her thing very well indeed. Will has a mild panic attack. Hannibal is annoyed, again, and we know how that usually ends. Mischa is delightfully Mischa. And in the BSCHI Abel Gideon begins his own period of weirdness. The team talk the Ripper, and Hannibal is intrigued. Alana is inappropriate.

They're not bad you know? You both look pretty relaxed and happy, content. They're rather sweet.'

Bev and Will are looking at photos he and Hannibal posed for this morning for a short photo piece by Freddie, as a follow on, to dispel the rumours. They'd certainly played up the fact that Will was now resident in Hannibal's house.

'Can you tell I'm wearing one of his jumpers? We were trying to be very coupley, did it work?

'Yeah, kind of. You look a bit platonic but apart from that'

'Really? Damn. I wasn't feeling it! But short of plastering myself all over him, I'm not sure what would have been enough. We both got a bit awkward towards the end. She asked some very personal questions.'

'What, like which one of you tops or bottoms or if you switch?'

'Beverly!'

'People want to know these things?'

'People?'

'Yeah, ok some of us. There's $50 riding on which one of you err, rides?' She goes for her trademark wink, but doesn't quite manage it, she's feeling just a touch guilty.

'Look, don't say anything, but, we haven't actually had sex yet'

'What?' She squeaks 'why not?'

'Oh you know, usual stuff, it's been a bit difficult, well I have, my brain has. I'm too weird, you know, he wants to fuck me and not whoever else's brain I'm currently in, he's too busy, I'm away, he's at a meeting. You know?'

'Maybe. But all the same we've got to work on that some more!'

'Ok. Thanks Bev. I think. So, today, yeah, bleh. I've agreed to see Abigail Hobbs today, this afternoon. I can't think what possessed me to agree. But there it is. Alana thinks it'll be useful and I couldn't think of any reasons not to beyond what I've already explained.'

'You and Alana ok?'

'I don't know. We're having coffee after I see Abigail'

'Oh. Ok. Good luck with that, she looked pretty chummy yesterday.'

'Yeah, not my choice though really. Did I say Matthew Brown was there?'

'Really? Did he take the photographs?'

'You know that didn't occur to me, the bastard.'

.....

Hannibal's morning has also been trying, to say the least. He's fielded calls, texts and emails from various people, even his preferred butcher passed a remark, much to Hannibal's chagrin. He is not best pleased. The session with Freddie went well. Clever of them to agree so quickly. So it made the morning news addicts. What Will and Hannibal haven't done is identify that they are both going to see Abigail Hobbs today and that Will is also seeing Alana. Will might be staying with Hannibal but not everything gets spelled out, they're still working out what it's like to be around each other semi full time.

When Will arrives at Port Haven he's not entirely sure he knows what Abigail's agenda is. They have a long rambling conversation, which is actually nice if not very purposeful, friendly even. She can be very sweet when she tries after all. Will rather likes her, or thinks he could. Towards the end she mentions the photographs, sad that either he or Dr Lecter might have been upset by them. He's slightly manoeuvred into a position when he claims they are not a big deal, 'oh for De Lecter too?' She asks,

'Sure, he shouldn't be concerned'

Later on he will wish he had phrased that differently.

After they've finished talking Alana collects Will, and Abigail makes a kind of throw away remark about how sweet they'd looked in the pictures. Will is slightly thrown by this and doesn't get a good answer together in response. Alana tucks her hand through his elbow and she directs him to the staff room. At the end of their drink she insists on walking him out, she goes with him all the way to his car and then gives him a firm embrace and kisses him on the cheek, she holds on a bit longer and strokes the back of his head. Will looks down at the ground, already overwhelmed by what she is feeling.

As she waves him off he is so discombobulated that five minutes down the road he has to stop as he doesn't quite feel well enough to drive. He glances into the passenger seat and isn't too surprised to see Garrett Jacob Hobbs sitting there. When he looks in the rear view mirror

there are two more in the back seat. One is sitting on the hood of the car too. Great. It's a whole party.

Will sits there, willing his breathing to normalise. Nope. Not any time soon. He resigns himself to being overwhelmed but first takes the car keys out and puts them outside of the car on the ground and then locks himself inside. He can get out. But better if it's really hard to, and it's also good that it is harder if not impossible to drive.

Back at Port Haven Hannibal is just getting out of the Bentley. He is parked at the far end of the car park, which is useful in the circumstances. He's just seen something he's a little taken aback by. Surely that was Will and Alana. She's acted fast on her promise. And Will didn't seem entirely unwilling. He finds he is rather dismayed by this, and dismayed by just how much. He goes to the reception to ask for Alana and she makes no mention of having seen Will. He finds himself somewhat disconcerted by this too.

Eventually when he's left alone with Abigail he suggests they might like to go for a walk. She agrees very readily and goes to get a coat. They walk for a while before she mentions the dance and the photographs. It's an offer of commiseration, and at this moment he's just a little bruised and willing to take it at face value. She mentions the original photos and asks very innocently if Hannibal thinks Will is maybe trying to play Alana off against Beverly. After all it had the result of Alana staking her claim to him.

'I asked him about how you felt, and he said something about it not being your concern, or you shouldn't, you know. So I guess it's good it's worked out and he and Dr Bloom are involved.'

Hannibal is about to deny this, when he has just a faint trace of uncertainty. There was a point when he did think Will was interested romantically in Alana, all that business over the hospital visiting. Maybe he, Hannibal has the wrong end of it?

Abigail hasn't finished, he tunes back into what she's saying 'he came to see me, he said! But he spent most of the time with Dr Bloom. Maybe I was just an excuse? Can you help me up?'

Hannibal gives Abigail a hand up the deep step, she briefly holds onto his arm to steady herself.

'Alright?' She nods, 'Abigail I think it is best to not to interfere in other's lives (yeah right Hannibal) I'm sure Dr Bloom and Dr Graham are quite capable of managing their own affairs'.

'Sure looked like it to me, but you know, whatever'

And isn't this another phrase that is going to come back and bite him later?

.....

Driving away from Port Haven he doesn't turn straight towards Baltimore but heads towards Quantico and Will. He needs to ask him right now. Before this gets out of hand. As he's driving along he suddenly spots what he thinks is Will's car on the hard shoulder beside the road. He has to go past, but parks a little further on and walks back.

When he reaches the car he sees the keys on the ground and Will sitting in the passenger seat with his eyes closed.

'Will? Are you here? Can you hear me?'

'Yeah. I can hear you. I'm here. I'm just. You know. Recovering. You're not Garrett Jacob Hobbs are you? I'm not going to look for another minute or so. You sound like Hannibal, with any luck you are. Keep talking.....please.'

'Will, I'm going to unlock the car, and I'll keep talking to you. I've just come from Port Haven, I was visiting with Abigail Hobbs. Is that where you've come from? It probably is. I can imagine that might have been somewhat trying. I find myself tried. And also found wanting. Dear Will. I can assure you I am not Garrett Jacob Hobbs.

I also saw Alana' he sees Will frown mightily as though he might also cry 'that was also testing in its own way. Don't worry Will. All will be well. I'm certainly not Alana. I'm going to take hold of your hand if that's alright. It might help ground you a little. Tell me who you are, and where you are, and also the time'

'Yeah. This hand' he holds one up and Hannibal takes it 'ok, that's good, you feel like Hannibal too ok. Right. I'm Will Graham, I'm in my car holding my friend's hand, and it's,' he opens his eyes to look at the car clock, and then at Hannibal '3:50 which means I've been here for more than two hours. Well just fuck my life.' He closes his eyes for a second or two and then opens them and swings round and gets out of the car and stands. He lets Hannibal pull him into a tight embrace.

'I think I can say that Abigail was a shit and Alana was manipulative'

'I think I might second that'

'You too?'

'Mostly Abigail but a little of Alana as well. She did warn me she saw you as a contest she was going all out to win. I witnessed the embrace and kiss at the car. I'd just arrived.'

Will says something very rude indeed. Only the second time in his life he's said ever said the word in anger. He holds Hannibal tighter.

'Abigail also said some stuff, she got in my head a bit. Wound me up. I think I said a couple of things that could be misinterpreted.'

'Ahh. Not only me then?'

'I said you didn't need to be concerned, I didn't mean it wasn't your business, I meant there was no reason for you to worry. I said something else too, that came out wrong. I don't know

what'

'I said something about you and Alana being able to manage your own affairs. Which, well you can see how that might be re-framed and used.'

'Do you think Abigail might just possibly be in Alana's head a bit?'

'It's a generous thought, I'm not entirely willing to give up my grievance. But you are almost certainly right.'

'She played both of us just perfectly.'

'Abigail Hobbs is extremely skilled. And dangerous.'

'Hannibal? Why were you driving in this direction, Baltimore is the other way?'

Hannibal pauses and then decides if there is going to be manipulation and misdirection he won't add to it. 'I was disconcerted by what I saw and what was said. I wanted to come and find you to talk. I'm glad to have found you. Sorry too. For what has happened. And I am ashamed to admit the extent to which they both disconcerted me.'

'It's ok. I get it. I had a fucking panic attack, I get that you felt disconcerted, totally. Shit.. we have to try to keep talking to each other. If we don't. Shit. It could get really messed up'

Hannibal runs his hand through Will's hair. 'How are you feeling now?'

'Better. Quite a lot better. Thank you. Pissed off though.'

'As am I'

'I've still got to go to the lab. Do you want to come? Find out where we're at on the animal thing?'

'Will that be acceptable to your colleagues?'

'What, the chance to make fun of both of us? Sure.'

Hannibal kisses him lightly but Will kisses harder until they're seriously unaware of their surroundings when a car passes and there's a ragged cheer from the passengers. They both blush.

.....

At the lab they find the group distracted by an old case. Abel Gideon is a patient at the BSHCI and has recently been shooting his mouth off about being the Chesapeake Ripper. Hannibal stills when he sees all the blown up photos of the Ripper's kills spreads round the lab. It is a substantial body of work.

Will has mentioned in their conversations that the Ripper is to Jack as Moby Dick was to Captain Ahab. Hannibal wonders at the wisdom of naming a killer after an infamous one in

Victorian London that was never caught. The Ripper has been quiet for the last two years. But every now and again Jack wants everyone to look again just in case. There was a young FBI trainee who might have been his last victim. If she was she wasn't displayed. But Jack still frets for her.

'Hey Will, Dr L, great to see you' Bev pauses significantly, stretching it out, as long as she can, just a bit more, 'together'

'Hey Bev, thanks for that. So, why have we got the Ripper top ten out again? Just because of Gideon? Nothing else?'

'I think it's because it's just a teeny bit quiet, I mean we've only got a weird animal thing going on and malicious photos involving the team, so you know. No one's actually dead or dying, or trying, so we get the Ripper to play with again.'

'Do you have other cases like this? Effectively cold?'

'Apart from the Zodiac and Jimmy Hoffa? Sure there are rather a lot. Most of them are just a few kills so they're classified as a serial but they never really got going. Or they changed their MO so much we haven't spotted them. It's what Jack fears about the Ripper that he's changed and we won't see him again. Well, not on Jack's watch anyway.'

'I didn't realise you'd go back over things in such detail'

'Well sometimes a new technique is developed and we get the physical evidence out just to see if we can learn something more. Sometimes we do, but it doesn't really go anywhere, sometimes it might.'

'Do you ever think you might solve one of the big ones?'

'If they're still active, maybe. The Ripper is probably dormant. Like a volcano? I expect him to start up again at some point. I don't think it's a compulsion with him. He just, well, he likes it. It's his thing. Probably the rest of the time any of us could pass him on the street and we'd not bat an eyelid at him. Oh except Will. Maybe Will would get a whiff. What do you think? You weren't on it last time around?'

'Maybe. I don't know. From the photos I'd say his stuff is very clean. I don't mean forensically. It's quite sterile in some ways, clinical.'

'I remember reading somewhere he might be medical personnel or have training?'

'Yeah, that's right Freddie made a big thing of it last time round, we had loads of people phoning in their doctor if they had a dodgy bedside manner.'

'Indeed, it makes me want to look at my own colleagues more closely'

The team laugh and Will shows Hannibal some pictures taken more than fifteen years ago 'we think this this was his first set in the US, but we don't really know. He might have simply switched into the mode we see now at this point. Or he might have been abroad. Some of the

countries in Europe who track this kind of thing have lots of unsolveds on their books. Makes you think..'

'Think what?'

'All the places it might not be safe to go on holiday'

They laugh again at this and Will adds 'still, Eastern Seaboard of the US? We do pretty well for ourselves here. No need to go away, why not have a murderous staycation?'

Once again they laugh. 'Ok, so any more on our more run of the mill case?'

'A little, Jack is coming along soon, Bev is going to give the highlights, can you hang on?'

'Sure, great, Hannibal?'

'Certainly. If that's acceptable?'

'Well, it involves you so as long as Jack's ok with it, actually why wouldn't he be, he's had you inside Will for a while now.'

There's silence in the room 'ok, I missed the word "head" out of that sentence. He's had you... actually, never mind. I'll stop digging.'

'Please, do continue digging, if only to change feet'

'And this is why I love my co-workers Hannibal'

'Indeed, it would be difficult to see any alternative options'

'I am just that lucky'

'In all ways'

'Inside and out. Shit that came out wrong'

'Will, I believe you deserve each other.'

The science team high five each other and Jimmy tentatively offers a palm to Hannibal who smiles and then shakes it.

'The European version' he slightly smirks.

.....

Later that evening Hannibal is cooking while Will sits in the big armchair in the corner reading. He wonders if the armchair originally came to be placed here so that Mischa could

sit and converse whilst Hannibal prepared their meals. He's about to ask when he remembers he can't. He's still acting out a dubiously attributed to one of the chaperone novelists' stories with regards to Mischa.

'Are you sure I can't help?'

'I'm more than content. Thank you, it isn't an especially complex a dish. You are thinking loudly again.'

'I was about to be very domestic and ask about your day, but actually I've seen you off and on throughout. I'm just getting used to that idea instead.'

'How are you finding it?'

'Alarmingly easy'

Hannibal smiles. He'd like to tie Will to the chair and never let him go, but a willing resident is better than a surprised hostage. 'What makes it easy. You sound surprised, though you used the word alarmed'

'Do we have a rule about no psychoanalysis in the kitchen?'

'I believe we currently have no rules. Except perhaps to endeavour to talk things through openly as we both have a tendency to retreat or withdraw when wounded in some way. In different ways it is true. But that seems to be our default mode when pushed.'

'Ok. Can we have a rule about no psychoanalysis in the kitchen?'

'Might I occasionally indicate that something is primarily the interest of an intimate rather the inquiry of a professional?'

'Yeah. That sounds fair. I probably ask you things that sound suspiciously like a police style interrogation. So are we calling each other "intimates?"

Hannibal smiles. 'You have another word in mind?'

Will makes a face. The choices aren't great, boyfriend is just too hilarious, partner sounds a little too professional and businesslike, lover sounds too temporary, mate sounds bonkers, other half too sentimental, special friend makes him want to puke, dear friend he can imagine Hannibal getting away with but he'd sound as camp as group of tents, he's trying to ensure his brain stays away from words like "husband" or "fiancé" or anything else hinting of permanency, not because he doesn't want them, but because he does (yeah yeah, not had sex yet, and Will fervently believes in sex before marriage, because what if it's so bad or incompatible you both know it'll kill your relationship stone dead?).

'Ok. You went for the best of a bad lot of relationship descriptions. I'll take it'

Hannibal smiles at him, he can think of a few others that would work for him, but then he works Lithuanian aristocrat psychiatrist in a three piece almost every day. He's thinking of words like 'beloved, darling, my dearest, sweetest, my love' he suspects he'll succumb to all

of these at some point in the not too distant future. He'd certainly settle for any of them. And he also prays Will never calls him his boyfriend when he is there to witness it.

'You have nearly diverted us, but to return to my question?'

'What was it, oh ok. Alarmingly easy. Well. I'm surprised I haven't had a conniption fit about living in the city, or sharing with and around someone else (or several someones if he includes the residents of the third floor), or managed without my dogs, or just eaten cereal out of a box or juice from a bottle, or been a recalcitrant git for almost a week.'

'Am I so trying?'

'No. and that's the point I'm trying to make. You're not. It's easy. You're easy, no not like that' he gives Hannibal a significant look 'I just feel ok here. Good. It alarms me because. It's not something I normally do, or am. It's odd because it's not odd. Does this make any sense?'

'Of course. I have spent much of the last forty years living alone, I had expected to have wanted to skewer anyone here for any length of time (that isn't Mischa, Will adds) especially an unspecified length of time.' He smiles at Will and holds up the kitchen knife he is using. 'Instead I find myself inclined to use this knife for our mutual benefit in the preparation of dinner.'

'Good job. Don't tell me what it is. I like the surprise'

'Despite the ones we have had over the last few days?'

'Ok. Fair enough. I like the surprises you give me'
.....

Just as Will is going to bed he slips into the library ostensibly to choose another book, but really to see if Mischa has left him a message, he has one for her.

#hey Mischa, if you see the Baltimore Sun don't worry about the photo thing. I danced with Hannibal for the dances that mattered. It's just a storm in a tea cup (Mischa smiles when she reads this, she wonders if Will knows). The animal thing is also ok. Nothing new to report there. I hope all well with you? I'm going to actually go to sleep at a sensible time tonight. Sleep well. Will#

Earlier she left one

#Dear Will, from the pictures I think that someone is being very naughty. I like your hair. I think Hannibal probably did too. He said you looked very fetching. I think he's a bit in love with you. I hope you'll be kind. You do like him don't you? The pictures are a bit awful. But I think you're not a deceptive man. Chiyoh and I are both well. We're waiting to see if the stag man comes back. Isn't it interesting? Love Mischa#

When Will reads this his primary concern is to allay any of Mischa's concerns about the way he feels about Hannibal.

#ps. Mischa, just so you're absolutely clear, as far as I am concerned, it's only Hannibal. Everything is Hannibal. Ok? With no hesitation or equivocation. Hannibal, from beginning to end. I hope that allays any concerns you might have. Love Will#

He doesn't notice the bit about the stag man.

Blackbird fly, blackbird fly

Chapter Summary

> Still rubbish at summaries. Bedelia regrets seeing a temporary referral of Hannibal's, who could that be? Cinemas. Matthew Brown. Conversations. Alana and Bev make up. And feels.

Bedelia Du Maurier thinks it possible she has just found the limit of her tolerance as it extends to Hannibal Lecter.

He'd phoned her the day after the dinner and explained the complexity of the issues surrounding the photos and the impact a new case was having on his domestic life. He'd been persuasive and flattering and in the end she had agreed to see one of his patients for two weeks as a temporary referral.

She should have refused. Not simply because she did not want any more patients but because she should have realised that anyone Hannibal did not feel equal to because he was little distrait was someone who would, colloquially, get right up her nose. And he does. In spades.

When Bedelia read the file her heart sank slightly. The man had had a bad experience with medication fairly recently, had been hospitalised. He seemed too, from Hannibal's notes, to struggle with over attachment to his psychiatrist and other medical professionals. For a moment she wondered about Munchausen's syndrome.

However once she met the patient she thought she recognised a simple case of loneliness and searching for love in mostly the wrong places. Of course he might be seeking love where it couldn't be found as a way of self-sabotaging. Or as a way of keeping a level of control over his own preferences. Potentially interesting then. But on balance, almost certainly not.

The hour he is using this week has, lamentably, been almost entirely about Hannibal. Why Franklyn likes Hannibal. Why Hannibal is so good. Why on earth Hannibal is seeing this FBI fellow. Why Franklyn is the perfect friend for Hannibal. Why Hannibal would make an excellent friend for him. Why he respects Hannibal's professionalism, and regrets it too. Why Hannibal is holding off from referring Franklyn. And so on, Hannibal, Hannibal, Hannibal.

While she quite likes Hannibal, in small doses, this is outwith their careful repertoire of credit and exchange. Bedelia would love a glass of wine right now. She wonders if she could disguise it in a coffee cup. She could offer Franklyn a drink of something. If he talked about anything other than Hannibal she'd almost be fascinated by the sheer awfulness of it. She can only hope that he is not like this with Hannibal himself. Hannibal she suspects would be even less tolerant than she is barely managing to be.

'Mr Froidveaux, I'm sorry to say your hour is up. During the next week I would encourage you to do something you think Dr Lecter might actually disapprove of.'

It's fairly poor psychiatric advice but she's desperate to get him to talk about something else, and this might provide an avenue to explore. She hopes. A lot. It's 12am. That's not too early for a glass is it?

.....

Alana, sweetie, I promise you. Will is really seeing Dr Plushy Pants. No that's not right. Ok Alana, I feel I must tell you, gods no that's like something out of Jane Austen, Alana, fuck this shit, Will's fucking Hannibal, nah. And he's not, yet. But she can't tell Alana that. It'll give her hope. Gods knows why. Will is endeavouring to try and get his rather tentative relationship onto firmer footing with the good doctor so don't please rock the boat? Closer to the truth. Ok, here she goes..

'Hi babe. It's nice to see you. Are we good now?' Bev leans over to kiss Alana's cheek, and give her a little hug. It seems it's ok. Alana hugs back.

'I am sorry Bev. I was upset. But now it looks like it's helped get things back on track. You know, encouraged Will to be more open.'

'Oh? What did he say?'

'That who he saw isn't Hannibal's concern. That he thought the photos were good. That he'd made an excuse to see Abigail when really he wanted to see me. Apparently Hannibal said that any affair Will and I had was totally our business. So it looks like he's seeing sense finally too.'

'Oh. Ok. Alana, sweetheart, that's not been my impression but well, if they said that to you, then well. I'm just surprised.'

'You're not jealous are you Bev. I know you said not in a million years. But I just want to check?'

'Nope, not in several million years. But you know, have at it.' Bev smiles weakly at her friend. She's not convinced, but Alana seems very sure.

'Ok then. Thanks. Sweet of you to give in so gracefully' she drinks her coffee and then sees the time 'must dash, so glad we're ok. Bye'

Bev is still trying to get to grips with the fact that Alana thinks that Bev feels that she has 'lost' Will to Alana. WTF?

She's feeling grumpy when she stomps from the canteen back to the lab and snarls at an intern. When she gets to the lab Will and Hannibal are waiting patiently for the various lab team members and Jack to appear for yet more updates.

She glowers at them 'I just had coffee with Alana. Thanks for telling me guys. I looked a right idiot.'

Hannibal and Will exchange looks 'telling you what Bev?'

'Really? You're going with that old chestnut. Did you or did you not say that Dr Lecter had no business being concerned about your affair with Alana? And that you've been sneaking off to see her when you're supposed to be seeing someone or doing something else entirely?'

She looks really pissed off and Will can feel his own anxiety start to climb. Hannibal touches his arm and then slides his hand down to hold Will's hand,

'it's alright Will. Beverly. I'm sorry. This is Abigail Hobbs. Regrettably Abigail is enjoying a period of intense manipulation and aggressive interference. Both of us used those words but they have been utterly stripped of their context. I can only say that if Alana had said them to either of us first it would have been difficult to deny saying them without a lengthy explanation, which she may not be interested in. But we would have warned you. I'm sorry you too have been caught in this rather neat trap. I think we will forestall it with Drs Zeller and Price.'

Beverly looks at them both, carefully, to make sure they're on the up and up now. 'Ok. Shit. That's nasty. I believed her too. Because she believed it 100%. Shit. I feel like I've got to get her out of this. You two can't, obviously. But someone must tell her. It's not kind to let her carry on like this'

'But can you? Doesn't she think you're jealous?'

'Well, yes, but how did you know that. Wait. Abigail?'

'In so many words'

'Ok. It's the bros then. Well have to brief them later. She's a twisted little thing isn't she?'

'She may well be bored.'

'Can she go and bored somewhere else please?'

'Do we know for sure about the photos now?'

'We know they're from a smart phone reported stolen two weeks ago. But the account wasn't terminated cos the guy wanted it tracked. Last used the night the dinner pictures were sent out. We know of eight people the first lot were sent to; Alana, Hannibal, Dr Du Maurier, Freddie Lounds, Beau G? (That's my dad, frowns Will), Abigail Hobbs (nice touch), Jack Crawford, and one unlisted number. The second lot went to the Sun and to Freddie. No one else.'

'So, it doesn't actually take us much further? Hannibal can you help me remember to phone my dad this evening. He probably just laughed at them, but just to be on the safe side.'

Hannibal nods. He's wondering about the unlisted number. Who might that be? 'Do we have an area code for the unlisted number?'

She shrugs 'not a thing, we're going to run a reverse directory, but for some numbers that can take days or even longer to get it pinned down. Well just have to wait. Sorry. Hey guys,' she says as. Brian and Jimmy come into the lab 'guess what shit you'll hear this week unless someone tells you first not to believe a word of it?'

.....

In Baltimore Mischa reads Will's two notes. She's hugely relieved. She wasn't really worried. Well maybe a very small bit. And it sounds like Will might love Hannibal too. Or is on the way to doing so. That would be very good. She wonders if there is any way to make sure that this happens. Oh she won't drug him again. Hmm. She'll have to think.

Whilst she is making tea in the kitchen, see she's someone sitting outside in the back garden under the tree. He waves to her, and she waves back. She holds up the pot as if to offer him a cup and he jumps up and walks to the back paved area. He sits on the low wall that holds back the planting on the steps and smiles at her.

She opens the back door and holds the tea out to him offering the sugar though she thinks he doesn't take it. He smiles happily and points at the tea. Then she realises he's pointing at the spoon. It is the one that Will made for Hannibal from a nice piece of black walnut.

They spend a companionable half hour drinking several refills. They've established a way of communicating where Mischa asks questions and makes assertions until the man indicates that he's happy with the answer/idea. She'd tried paper the first few times they spoke but he wasn't interested in reading or writing anything. He's completely open about being the person who brought the willow sculptures, he and his father (she thinks it's his father, might be a sibling) made them and then he drove down here to deliver them.

He did the chalk marks too. The first time they met she went to fetch some chalk and paper and he took it away with him. When he brought it back it was a picture of Will with a stag with raven's feathers. She's not sure if he drew it or his father or sibling did. It's lovely, and he lets her keep it. Inside, after he'd gone she'd used fixative as Hannibal did when making a charcoal drawing. It's in her room now. Near her bed where she doesn't think Chiyoh will have much of a reason to look.

.....

'Bedelia, I am sorry you have had a trying time with my patient. I am very grateful. I am feeling perhaps mildly overwhelmed by the varying degree of occurrences, well, occurring.'

And that's a first for Bedelia. Hannibal Lecter in not quite perfect English shock.

'And what form does overwhelmed take for you Hannibal, how does it make you feel'

'Surprise. Shock even. I had got to a point in my life when I felt there was little that I had not experienced to some degree or extent.'

'And now?'

'Over the last week I have become personally involved in two cases the FBI is following. It's disconcerting as both of them are personal in intent as well as in scope. They have also involved people I think of as friends, that too is unusual'

'Hard for someone to support people as friends when they have limited experiences of friendship?'

Hannibal frowns. He doesn't quite agree 'I am not sure I concur. Even with limited experience it is possible to offer, to bring something appropriate to the situation. I do not feel I have failed in this regard'

'But you do in others?'

'Perhaps'

'Is this about Will Graham'

Hannibal is silent for a moment or two. Sometimes he feels reluctant to lay himself open to Bedelia's scrutiny. Her's is not always a benevolent gaze.

'To some extent. He is one of the people involved, as you know. I regret that these cases put him under pressure.'

'Because of how he then is with you?'

'Possibly that is one part of it. But I also wish for him not to suffer at anyone's hand. He is a compassionate man and he is struggling.

'Do you think his compassionate nature is what attracts you to him?'

'I think all of his friends and acquaintances benefit from his compassion. But no, I'm not deflecting, it is only one part of a complex matrix of attributes that I think of as compelling.'

'You are somewhat obsessive about him?'

'I am interested in him'

'And your interest is obsessive.'

'But not excessive.'

Bedelia is quiet then. It is just possible that what ever it is that Hannibal feels for Will Graham it is more significant in Hannibal's life than she had realised. She had anticipated a mild dalliance, or brief friendship wearing itself out when Hannibal recognised the other man's limitations and boundaries. But rather than it fizzling out, adversity has made it stronger. Interesting. And Hannibal is protective of it too. This might be interesting after all. She mentally sharpens some knives.

.....

Back at Quantico Will realises he has completely forgotten about his doctor's appointment. Shit. He phones the clinic to let them know. The receptionist sighs a lot and re-books his appointment. He has a little worry. About missing the appointment, about the photos, about Hannibal, shit he didn't call his dad, about everything. He sits in his office chair, leaning to get the thin window view. There's a knock on his door.

'Will?'

'Hey Jimmy? How's it going?'

'I'm fine thanks, I came to find out how you are?'

'Struggling a bit. And trying not to. You know. It's all a bit much.'

'Wanna come and see a film this evening? Nothing too taxing?'

'Yeah ok. I might need to let Hannibal know, just so I don't either worry him or get locked out.'

'Haven't you got a key'

'I forgot it this morning. It might have been my subconscious rebelling against the domesticity!'

'Oh you're just the best. Have I said how great it is since you joined the team?'

'Really? Thanks.'

'It's good, it gives up better balance, Bev on one side the three of us on the other.'

'Ok. I can see that. She is a force of nature'

'Yeah, and nurture.'

'Yes she is. We're lucky aren't we?'

'No shit. Do you want to ask Dr L too?'

'Ok. Do you know I can't quite imagine him at a cinema, but hey. What do you think we could see?'

'I'm rooting for Guardians of the Galaxy, but Z wants Lucy.'

'Oh. Ok. I'm no help I'd go to either. But a talking raccoon is hard to beat.'

'Text Dr L, see you at 6:00 in the Golden Bar? It's the nearest place, we could grab a quick drink first?'

*hey Hannibal. Cinema tonight? I know it sounds pretty unlikely. No dressing up this time so we can't indulge your lingerie thing (sorry). Six pm at the Golden Bar. I can promise you either a talking tree and raccoon or a fascinating investigation into the origins of humanity

and humanness. We haven't decided yet. Showing ends at 10:15, we'll probably go to the bar after. So if that appeals more? Oh and I am am a dufus because I forgot the key. All suggestions gratefully received. Will*

Will, you make the raccoon sound appealing. Alas a meeting this evening. I'll try to join you in the bar later. And yes a dufus indeed. I'm not familiar with that particular appellation but it sounds right. I haven't ignored your comment about the lingerie. I'm merely thinking through an appropriate revenge. Something in black satin maybe with lace? Warmly (!) Hannibal Lecter

Hannibal smiles at his small piece of humour and presses send.

.....

'I am groot'

'Iiiiii am groooooooot'

'I aaaaaaammm groott'

'Apparently he recorded it several thousand times'

'The dedication of the acting profession is extraordinary'

Will sticks his tongue out at Hannibal 'you are not groot'

'I am devastated. So, another drink? Beverly, you must come to the bar with me because whatever that was I will not order it. Zeller? Another? Dr Price? Will, we need another hand could you assist?'

The three of them go to the bar. Jimmy and Brian watch them idly. They see Hannibal stiffen as the three of them return. As Will and Beverly slide into the booth he puts down the two drinks he is carrying and says 'excuse me briefly'

Will and Beverly remain oblivious as Jimmy and Brian watch him go to a table near the door. There is a brief discussion there and the man sitting at the booth gets up, shoots a filthy look in their direction and then at Hannibal, and leaves the bar. Hannibal returns to their booth and Jimmy is about to ask when Brian kicks him under the table 'sorry Jimmy, I think my foot slipped, you ok?'

'Yeah fine. No problem.'

Hannibal says nothing so they drink, laugh, talk about the film. Talk about other films they've enjoyed. As they leave Jimmy looks questioningly at Hannibal 'Matthew Brown. Let's say nothing please'. Outside they walk down the street. Beverly has her arm through Will's, Hannibal, Jimmy and Brian walk three abreast. Will pulls up short. Matthew is leaning on a car just ahead of them

'Fancy seeing you here. Alright then? See you and the nice pyjama lady are ok. You break it off with the doc? Oh sorry didn't see you there. Nice night for it.'

He straightens up and walks towards them stopping short, not quite in their personal space. 'You let me know if you're lonely, right? That what friends are for.' To everyone's surprise and before they can do anything he reaches towards Will and pats his face. He turns sharpish and is gone before they've really registered his action. Will looks like he's been slapped. Shaken. Bev manages 'what the fuck?'

The five of them stand still on the pavement. Will takes a deep breath. 'It's ok. It's ok. I'm alright. Just a surprise. Really. Shit. Bastard.' Bev holds his arm tighter and he squeezes her hand. 'Ok. Getting there.' From his pocket Brian produces a bar of soap and holds it up to Will's nose. He takes a sharp breath and then laughs. 'Ok. That's good. Wow. Good plan' he takes another long inhale. 'Surprisingly effective!'

Hannibal is mystified, so Jimmy explains 'we talked about ways to help Will stay grounded, one of the things was coal tar soap, a distinctive smell, you know, familiar and with good associations',

Hannibal looks at Will 'yes?'

'My Grandmaw, my dad too. Someone I dated in college. Good things. I didn't think it would work so well. Brian thank you. Amazing'

An effective strategy, Hannibal notices his own sharp reaction to news of a previous relationship of Will's. What is that? Oh yes. That's the shape of jealousy. He'd last had that when he'd seen Matthew Brown with Will at the cafe/bar near the cabin.

'Shall we stop into a cafe or shall we continue?'

'I'm ok, let's all just be normal. Thanks folks. We are groot.'

There are smiles and five minutes further on they see Beverly, Jimmy and Brian into Jimmy's car. All back to his place as they're still all staying there.

Will and Hannibal walk the thirty minutes back to the house. They don't see Matthew Brown again but perhaps they are both thinking of him

'Will, did you remember your appointment?'

'I remembered to reschedule it! I'm taking that as progress.'

'Very well. Let's call it progress. I'm intrigued by the strategy the team has adopted, how did that come about.'

'They're being great. It was on the Lost Boys case when you were driving with Jack. We came up with a couple of things they might be able to do. I don't know how effective they'd be for "lady of the lake" type shit, but for something like Matthew Fucking Brown, it was good. Bugger, I still haven't talked to my dad.'

'Tomorrow perhaps? I think it might be too late now. What hours does he keep?'

Will pulls out his phone 'yeah a bit too late. I'll call him tomorrow.'

Back at the house Hannibal lets them both in and Will picks up the key sitting on the side table that Hannibal intended for him to use. He attaches it to his key fob.

'Ok? Now I won't get locked out, or make you stay up later than you want to to let me in.'

'I would always let you in'

'You say the nicest things to me. Is it ok if I make some tea or something?'

'Certainly. What would you like?'

'I've got the packet of tea you made me, maybe that? I'll go and get it'

When he comes back Hannibal is in the kitchen. He's looking at the teapot and two mugs turned upside down on the drainer. Just frowning very slightly.

'What is it?'

'Hmm? Oh nothing. I thought I'd put these away this morning.'

'Not like you to forget'

'Perhaps. It has been a stretching week'

'True. Where did you put the award thing?'

'I'm not going to ask why you thought of that. It's in the library, there's an inconspicuous place for that kind of thing.'

'Ok, polite but modest?'

'Yes. Quite so.'

'Have you a collection?'

'One or two things. It's hard not to be given something if you're a patron of the arts or occasionally do something of a more charitable nature.'

'You differentiate between the two?'

'My investment in the arts I think is entirely selfish, for my own pleasure. Some of my charitable giving is more for the benefit of others. Though of course I recognise that in those instances the knowledge of my giving is what I find satisfying.'

'Not naive enough to believe in a purely altruistic action?'

'I had not thought it existed. But then I met you and saw the work you do'

'That's not altruistic. I do it because I don't feel I have a choice'

'And yet its effects, and the outcomes imply a degree of altruism? You do something, for nothing in return'

'I get paid though. Yeah ok. I know that's a poor answer. What do I get? A headache, misery, a feeling of losing myself? I guess it only works if I'm a masochist. And I'm pretty sure I'm not. I like it when nice things happen to me. I just can't always spot that they are, or realise I'm too busy getting mentally overtaken to be able to enjoy it. Douglas suggested I take some beta blockers for the migraines. He said they've been effective in some patients.'

'Yes. And potentially addictive.'

'I know. But I'm a bit desperate at present. Yeah I can read that off you right away, addictive meds and desperation are not a great combination'

'I shall try not to telegraph my feelings quite so graphically'

'You do well a lot of the time. It's one of the reasons I'm comfortable around you.'

'Good. And now at the risk of telegraphing extensively, I am rather tired, I'm going to go to bed. What do you wish for tonight?'

'I'm mostly ok about the Matthew thing. I sort of want to try a night alone. But I also don't. I like sleeping with you.' He rubs his face. 'Ok, with. Please. Sorry if I don't make that sound like I'm thrilled. That's not about you!'

'Will I am quite content to share a bed with you under most circumstances.'

'I know. Have you talked to your psychiatrist about that? That's possibly also a sign of masochism'

'I'm changing my mind'

'Is that masochism too?'

'Rapidly'

'Black satin and lace you said'
'I haven't forgotten'

'10,000 hours'

'Or that'

Into the dawn

Chapter Summary

> The problem of having a manipulative scheming patient with agency in the world.or Abigail Hobbs is a machinating manipulative minx. Minx I say!

Hannibal-San? Has your friend left?'

'Chiyoh, how lovely. Please have a seat. May I offer you coffee?'

'Thank you. Yes.'

'Is there something particular? Or is this a social interlude. How is Mischa?'

'I think she has been a little disturbed by all the goings on.'

'It is unfortunate. Yes. It's true. But I hope things will calm down somewhat now. The issue to do with the photographs is being resolved. The matter of the protection circle seems to be currently in abeyance. And other matters are slowly progressing'

'Mischa wants to meet with Will Graham. I think it bothers her.'

'I know. I can only reassure you and her that I am trying to realise a situation in which that will be possible. He is very overstretched with work.'

Hannibal-San may I say, with regret that it is possible that his is the kind of work that will always place him under considerable stress. There may never be a good time.'

Hannibal signs. He knows Chiyoh is right. 'You are right Chiyoh. I am perhaps reluctant at present because Will is more or less compelled to stay here, and I would rather he at least has the option of some physical distance when he and I have the conversation.'

'I can see that. Is he concerned about his home?'

'No. it's just that the FBI are maintaining a low level of surveillance here, and would be reluctant to split it between the two houses. The other three science team members are currently staying with Dr Price. For the same reasons.'

'I understand.'

'I know it is disruptive. Would you prefer to take Mischa away?'

'No, though she has begun to talk about being away for Christmas.'

'Already? Well. I suppose it is not so far away. The Christmas invitations go out next week.'

'Yes. We have already addressed them. I've added in Will Graham and done one for each of the science team as you asked.'

'Thank you. It will be good to have something to look forwards to. Beyond all these. Circumstances.'

'I agree. A long focus is a valuable scope.'

They smile at each other. There's is a friendship spread over many years and different trials.

'Chiyoh, you could meet Will separately. I have spoken of you to him. Might that be a start?'

'I will ask Mischa. I am inclined to say yes. But in part that is simply my own curiosity. If it should suit when might be appropriate?'

'I'd like to suggest today, this evening. But I'm not sure what Will's schedule is. He went this morning, grumbling about a class and some assignments he is returning.'

'I had forgotten, really he is a teacher.'

'He is. This work in the field is not his preference'

'Difficult then. A generous man.'

'Yes. Generous'

'And possibly foolhardy, because of what it does to him. Maybe he does not yet see there are many spheres of influence not just the two he is currently occupying.'

'I would encourage you to convince him'

'Of course' she inclines her head and they smile.

.....

'Abigail, what are you looking at?'

'Oh Dr Bloom. Sorry. Em sent me some more pictures. I was just looking at them. Here's one of Dr Lecter. I don't know the lady though.'

'No. nor do I. That's his living room. Maybe a friend. He's very popular. He's a good psychiatrist.'

'I'm lucky he's willing to help me aren't I?'

'Maybe not lucky. But I'm glad he is. Do you like him'

'Yeah. He's ok really. I think you understand me better, but it's useful to get another person's view, you know, like a second opinion. That's what you try and get with doctors don't you?'

'Well yes. But usually for physical illnesses. But sure. In theory. What other pictures have you got?'

'This is nice of you and Dr Graham. Would you like it?'

'Are you sure? That's nice of you.'

'I've got a double set. I think Em got some deal. I can give the duplicates to anyone who wants one. Will you tell Dr Lecter about the one of him? Or I could just give it to you to give him?'

'Of course. I'll ask him. That's nice of you. Now, about group. I think we agreed you'd try it again. Different people now. Could easily be better.'

'Ok. I know I said I would.'

.....

'Hannibal. How are you? Yes. I'm sorry about that too. I've had a word with her. That's right. Actually I've just come from there I saw Abigail today she's got some photos from the dance, there's a good one of you would you like it? I've got it here. You're dancing with a tall blonde woman. No it's not someone I know. Ok. I won't. Ok. Sure. Shall I hang on to it? Ok. Talk soon. Bye.'

Hannibal's first thought is damn. No. wait. He danced with Bedelia at the dinner. Though he wouldn't describe her as tall. It must be her. Unless. Surely not. He is covered in a momentary panic. This is potentially a vulnerable situation. If it is Mischa? No, no, no. It will be fine.

.....

'Dr Graham, thank you very much for coming to see me again. I really appreciate it. I'm sorry about last time.'

'It's ok Abigail. I think it's just easier if we keep off that stuff.'

'Oh. Ok. So you don't want any of the pictures then, from the dinner. Em sent me a duplicate set.'

Will grits his teeth a bit. 'Did he? I've seen some in the papers don't forget. I don't think I need to see them again really'

'Oh. But some of them aren't in the paper. Like the one of Dr Lecter with a blonde lady. It's really nice.' She rifles through the pictures. 'Oh, I gave that to Dr Bloom to give to him. Sorry.'

'Not to worry. I expect it's of Dr Du Maurier. She's another psychiatrist. She's a good friend of Dr Lecter. They were at University together or something.'

'Oh. Ok. That's nice. That explains why they were dancing at Dr Lecter's house.'

'Dancing?'

'Well. I assumed they were dancing. Because of the other pictures? Hang on. No I haven't got it, oh wait, is this them at the dinner?'

Abigail hands Will a copy of the picture of Hannibal dancing with Bedelia. It's good of them both. They dance well as partners. Maybe having had lots of practice. Will feels a rush of annoyance and maybe, yeah ok, ok, quite a lot of jealousy. Why were they dancing at home? Sorry. At Hannibal's house?

'Shall I give him that one?'

'Oh, it's ok. Dr Bloom has the photo, this is the spare. I've got one of you and Dr Bloom. That's very nice. I gave her the other one. You could both have it.'

'Abigail.. actually, ... ok, I'll have it. Thanks.'

Will sticks the photograph into his briefcase. If Abigail hasn't got it there's not much damage she can do with it.

'So, Abigail, what did you want to talk about?'

'Actually I wondered if you might be able to arrange for me to have an afternoon out or something. I think Dr Bloom would let me go with you. I'm not sure she'd trust me on my own. But if you were there too?'

'Oh. Ok. Maybe. What did you have in mind?'

'Just a walk somewhere. Maybe to collect things to make into decorations. You know. For Christmas. Pine cones and stuff'

'Sure. That doesn't seem impossible. I'll ask her. Not far, and maybe only a couple of hours?'

'That would be great. Thanks. You're really kind to me.'

.....

'Beverly, hey, glad to see you. You busy?'

'This second? No not really? What you got in mind?'

'Maybe a coffee or something, or lunch, or round trip to Wolf Trap, I haven't been there for ages.'

'Ok. That escalated fast. Yeah. Lets. We can call it a field trip. I haven't talked to you for a while.'

'Great. Shit. That reminds me I must call my dad. Will you drive?'

'I always drive. I am the default designated driver.'

Will grabs his briefcase up from the table where he'd thrown it. 'Ok, bag, keys, glasses, jacket, scarf, brain. Good to go'

Beverly looks at him 'spectacles, testicles, wallet and watch?'

'What's that from, that's a quote isn't it?'

'I dunno. It's just something my uncle says at Christmas when he's had a few. Every time he goes out doors. It's funny the first few hundred times.'

In the car Will calls his dad on his cell phone

'Hey, dad! Hi. Yeah. Ok. Bit weird but you know. No. I'm in the car. No dad not breaking the law Bev is driving. My friend. Yes dad. A female friend. Yeah. She's cute. I think so, hang on I'll ask. He asks if you're single? She's nodding dad. Wait why am I asking, dad, never mind. Yeah. The pictures. Oh did you. Thanks for that. Very trendy actually. No I know. That's Alana. Yeah dad also my female friend.

Yeah nice of Hannibal too. Yes. I dunno, maybe he gets lots of exercise. I know. No I think that's his colleague. I don't think so. I don't know. What do you mean? Of course I danced with him too. Yes. Plus one. No not Alana. I know it looks like that. Dad. Yeah. But it wasn't that. With him for now. There was some weird stuff tied into it. Except we don't know if it really is. Yeah. I know. Ok. For sure. Either tonight or tomorrow. Ok. I love you dad.'

'That sounded nice. What was the stuff about the pictures?'

'Oh. Well I saw Abigail today. She showed me some of the pictures from the dinner of us all dancing. Some of the ones that didn't get published. She showed me a nice one of Hannibal and Bedelia, his colleague Dr Du Maurier, she said she gave Alana one of Hannibal dancing with her at his home to give to him.'

'Will. Is this Abigail shit stirring?'

'If it is it's effective'

'Just ask him about it.'

'Maybe.'

'You trust him don't you?'

'Yeah. It's just. I've been a bit bad recently. I wouldn't blame him you know, for wanting a bit of breathing space.'

'I'm sure that's not it'

'I dunno. Look there's the house. Ok good. No new weirdness. I kind of miss it. Well, apart from you and Hannibal and the bros, I kind of miss my old life. You know. Quiet, teaching,

writing, reading, fishing, fixing stuff, the dogs. It was nice. Easy.'

'If you went back to it?'

'Basically that plus, you the bros and Hannibal would be pretty perfect.'

'It's good to dream Will'

'Yeah. That's all it is right now'

'Who's that on the porch?'

'Where. Oh. Oh my god. Oh'

'Will?'

Sitting on the porch are the two men from the mountains. Sitting, whittling, looking completely happy and settled in.

'Bev, these are my stag-nappers. I think this is going to be ok, but you know. Be careful. They're very nice. But also quite unusual. The younger one doesn't usually talk. He can. But he doesn't.'

'Fucking hell Will. Ok. Here goes' Bev turns the car so it's facing away towards the road. They get out with smiles and head towards the porch. Will sticks his hand out to shake. Both men nod at Beverly.

'Hey. You've come here to my place. That's amazing. Can I make tea? This is my friend Beverly, she was there, she's one of the team'

'Oh, and I'm rightly pleased to meet you. Him too. He might not say, but he's glad. My girl took a real liking to you. Said you were feisty.'

'She was the pie lady, isn't that right?'

'Ahh, bless you girl for reminding me of a slice of heaven.'

Bev smiles at them both. Will knows it is her 'what the very actual merry fuck' smile. But he's totally on board with that. That's the one on his face.

'Come on inside. Lets light a fire, are you cold?'

'Only on the outside boy. Be glad of something warming.'

'Bev will you put the kettle on? I'll get the fire going in here'

'Where are the dogs?'

'There's been some problems (and is Will going to say caused by these two fellows? Is he heck) so the dogs are with a friend, and I'm staying with the doctor'

'Your guy?'

'Yes. That's right'

'We gave him the stag. He's got that kind of feel to him'

'You gave Beverly the fox cubs, she likes them'

'Like calls to like, you know'

'Yes. Sometimes. I liked the Wolf. Thank you'

'It's not here though. What you done with it?'

'They're all together right now. We've been talking about it, thinking about it. The Parliament. The protection circle. Wondering what we need to do next. What you might want?'

'Only your commitment. A kind of willingness. If there's need.'

'Ok. I think we've been a bit worried we wouldn't know what you needed.'

'We'll let you know for sure.'

Bev comes in now with tea for everyone. And some biscuits. 'I think these biscuits are ok. Will when did you open them?'

'Oh I think they should be alright. Let me try. Yeah. Bit hard, but ok. Wow, I'm selling these aren't I, delicious biscuits. Yum. Ginger'

The older man laughs, while the younger man does his funny snuffle.

'What about that guy who was here. He took pictures of you two. Didn't he. We didn't run him off. I'm sorry for that. We should have helped him see the truth of things. '

'It's ok. I can't even really get him for trespass. He was. But it'd be hard to prove.'

'Surely. But we know.'

'Were you here? Actually here?'

'Yon'

The older man tilts his head in the direction of the woods.

'We made a place. Not for now. Come spring. You'll need us then'

'Ok. How's that?'

'Storm coming. Big one. Trying times. Tell you now. It won't be what it seems. Not one bit. You got family Will. Close?'

'Bev is family' she looks at Will bright eyed. Wow. 'My dad, the two men from the lab, Hannibal, the doctor. My boss. His wife. She's ill. Put something out for her will you?'

'Some kind of something? She leaving?'

'She will be. It's when not if'

'It is for us all, she's just been given wisdom enough to know.'

'Bella is really great. Jack, her husband. It's tough.'

'We'll send something.'

'Thank you.'

'And you? This man? Bothersome?'

'It's hard to tell. His cousin is tricky. Sweet but terrible. Terrifying.'

'You working a case?'

'Also hard to tell. Maybe. Not yet.'

'We'll keep an eye out'

'Are you staying on?'

'Not really. Got two messages to give and we'll be gone for a bit, for the turning. Then back. For the storm. Get settled in before she comes. Don't be afraid. It's like the fire. It proves things. If you let it'

The younger man says 'you feeling the fire already Will? I can hear it'

Will looks at him and blinks 'my head is bad, it's a sort of burnt feeling. So yes. Maybe'

'Make someone look. That's not right. Don't burn for the glory. Don't burn.'

'Ok. I'll try not to. I did see the doctor.'

'Oh them. Did they give you sugar pills?'

'Something to help me sleep mostly.'

'The dreams tell you the truth though'

'I still dream of the stag. He's often near. Oh wait, I've been slow. That's why Hannibal has the stag'

The two men look at each other as though they are amazed it has taken Will so long.

'Ask him if he dreams of the Wolf.'

They drink their tea. And if it were possible the conversation becomes a little more mundane. Gradually the two men make it clear they're heading off.

'Thank you Will. Don't forget. It won't be what it seems. Think of what else a stag is.'

'Alright. Thank you. And if we need to get in touch?'

'You can try my girl. Or try the Parliament. One of those would work.'

The two men stand and shake both Will and Beverly's hand. They go out the front door and walk away towards the woods. There is another road on the far side that won't bring them past the house. Maybe they'll go that way? Maybe they've a car or truck up there.

'Will?'

'I know'

'Should we have called Jack?'

'Probably. I don't know what good it would do'

'Ok. That was quite odd. What do they mean?'

'I think trouble. But we have that in spades already.'

'Can it get worse?'

'Only if I totally lose it. But I'll stop before then. I hope'

'You know I'll help.'

'I do.'

'What's the time?'

'Just before 7pm. I should ring Hannibal let him know where I am.'

'I'll ring Jimmy'

.....

'Chiyoh, I am really pleased to meet you. Hannibal speaks of you with much fondness. Are you here for long?'

'I come and go. I am lucky that Hannibal-San lets me stay so regularly.'

'I loved the cabin. Thank you so much for letting me stay there. We were all very grateful'

'It is a gift I am glad to share.'

'How was your day Will? Did you bring back the unlisted phone details? Jack said he'd give them to you, or that Beverly would.'

'He did, they're in my briefcase, I'll just..'

'No, no, stay where you are, is it in the hallway?'

'Yes, in the closet. Front pocket I think'

Whilst Hannibal goes to the hall, Will turns towards Chiyoh. He's about to say something friendly and bland when Chiyoh says

'Mischa told me this afternoon. We will need to talk. I have promised her I will say nothing as yet to Hannibal-SAN. I do not like to deceive him. But I know this is not of your making. Do you agree?'

'Errr. Yeah. Sorry. That's a surprise. Mischa didn't say she would.'

'I think she was worried I would catch her in the wrong part of the house at the wrong time. She has also been unusually happy and I asked her why. She does not choose to lie to me'

'Ok. Maybe tomorrow? Hannibal has an early doesn't he? How about after he goes?'

'Very well.'

Meanwhile... in the hallway Hannibal has picked up Will's briefcase. He takes it to the hall table and empties all the papers out. He indulges a small amount of nosiness. A pencil tin. A small tin with lozenges in which turns out to actually have fish flies in it. A packet of paper hankies. A note book with elastic band round it with a feather stuck through it. Maybe pheasant. A book, Marcus Aurelius, in Latin, Hannibal smiles. Well done Will. He opens it and sees it annotated in places. Hmm.

He goes through the papers. Essays. What looks like an early draft of a monograph. Phone records, ahh, here it is. As Hannibal starts to put everything back he catches the edge of an A5 sized photograph. He pulls it out. It's from the dinner. Of Will with Alana. Oh. He slides it back into the briefcase. For a moment at a loss. He stands in the hallway dismayed.

He puts the briefcase back in the hall closet and goes back into the small library. Chiyoh and Will both look up at him and smile. He smiles back. Slightly distracted.

The conversation continues, Chiyoh and Will doing most of the maintenance work. They're both surprised when Hannibal excuses himself.

'Forgive me. I'm a little tired. I have an early morning tomorrow. Let me wish you both goodnight'

he bends over and lightly kisses Will on the head and then takes Chiyoh's hand and kisses the back. They both look at him in surprise. And then at each other. Neither of them say anything as they hear him go upstairs. Chiyoh looks at Will and frowns

'What happened then?'

'I don't know. He's got the papers maybe he wants to go through them?'

'Maybe so. I will tell Mischa that we will talk tomorrow'

'Ok. Thank you Chiyoh.'

Will reads for another thirty minutes. If Hannibal needs space, then he'll be sure to give him it. It must be hard having someone stay when you're barely on the edge of a relationship. Especially when he knows he's been quite demanding and frankly a bit of a pain. Hannibal is probably quite tired overall. Damn. Will wanted to ask about the picture. Of Bedelia, dancing, with Hannibal. At home. Damn it. At Hannibal's house.

When Will goes to bed Hannibal's bedroom door is shut and it turns out he is not in Will's room. Will is utterly thrown. What on earth? Something's happened. He's really pissed Hannibal off. Oh god. And he hasn't told him about the protection circle yet. Or about Abigail. Shit. Damn. Fuck.
Will goes to bed. He takes two of the pills prescribed for him, the maximum dose. He lies in bed staring up at the ceiling. Wondering what the fuck he did.

In his room Hannibal hears Will go to his room. He hears the door shut and then the normal sounds of Will preparing to go to bed. Water running, the lavatory flushing, light switches. Then there is quiet. Hannibal's heart sinks. He'd thought Will would come and find him if he wanted him with him. He must want the space. Of course he might be struggling with what to do or say. Maybe this has all been... Better not to overwhelm him. Hannibal lies in bed. He looks up at the ceiling. Uncharacteristically downhearted.

Will doesn't sleep walk, but even with the pills it's a struggle. He falls asleep in the early hours of the morning. Feeling tearful.

Hannibal sleeps in fits and starts. Waking if he thinks he hears something. Will sleep walking? No, just the boiler coming on.

When Will comes down in the morning Hannibal has already gone to work. He didn't leave a note.

Will frowns as he checks the kitchen, living room and library. But nothing. Fuck. He's done something really bad. He must have.

Oh.

Mischa and Chiyoh come downstairs a little after 8:30 and they eat breakfast together. Will tries his absolute hardest to make this a happy interaction. By the end Chiyoh is convinced to wait to tell Hannibal that Will and Mischa have met. For some currently unspecified time, which may or may not be New Year.

When they've eaten Mischa hugs Will and Chiyoh gives him a slight bow, which he returns. He goes up to the room he's been occupying. He looks around at his clothes and books and

general detritus. Maybe he should go back home. Give Hannibal some breathing space. Now he knows the protection thing is ok. He and Bev better tell Jack.

Will packs most of his clothes. Just leaves one change. He puts his books into a pile. He can get them another time? No maybe take them now. He leaves one out that actually belongs to Hannibal, puts it on the bedside table. He sits on the bed. What happened?

He takes all of his stuff downstairs and then loads it into the trunk of his car. Back inside he collects his briefcase and retrieves the notepad and pencil tin. And drafts Hannibal a note.

#hey Hannibal, the good news is that the protection circle thing is semi resolved! More on that when I see you next. So I thought I'd give you some breathing space. I don't want to be in the way. Maybe dinner this week? If you'd like. I'd be happy to cook. But not if you'd rather. I hope your early has gone ok? I liked Chiyoh. Thank you for introducing us. Thank you for lots of things. Will#

#Mischa, I think the thing with the animals is over for now. It should be ok. I'm going to go back to Wolf Trap for a bit. I think it's possible I've annoyed Hannibal. But I'm not sure about what. I'm very sorry if I have. I thought I'd give him some breathing space. Hopefully I can make it right. But if I'm not around for a bit we'll, It's nothing you or Chiyoh have done or said. I'm really glad to have met her too. Love Will#

Later Mischa finds the note and frowns a little 'Chiyoh? Do you know what's happened?'

'No. it was odd. We were talking and Hannibal-San went to the hall and when he came back he had changed. Quite sudden. I do not know why. Will you ask him?'

'I will see how he is. Will has gone'

'Oh? Because of Hannibal-San?'

'Yes. I think so. I think he thinks he's done something.'

'Maybe he has'

'Yes. But I wonder what?'

.....

In the lab during the day Bev and Will fill Jack in on the protection circle. As they predicted he's not wild about it but he calls off the protection and emails all those involved.

When Hannibal returns home in the evening he opens a bottle of wine and when Mischa comes into the kitchen he silently pours her one too.

'Hannibal, what's happened? Your friend has gone.'

'He has, the protection circle issue seems to be somewhat resolved.'

'Yes. The stag man said they were leaving for now'

'Mischa! I didn't know you'd seen them let alone spoken to them'

'We had tea. They came here three or four times. They were very kind. They said there's a bad storm coming. In the Spring. They'll come back and help then. They were going to go and see Will Graham. Didn't he tell you?'

'No. it seems as thought there is quite a bit he hasn't told me'

'Hannibal, that doesn't sound right. Maybe he hasn't had time.'

Hannibal says nothing. Mischa knows this face. This is his unhappy but wont talk about it face. Oh dear. This is going to be difficult. And she can't even get in touch with Will.

.....

'Thank you Alana. I'm glad to have the photograph. I hardly ever see her, so it's a pleasure. Now. How are you? Are we friends again?'

'Yes. I'm sorry Hannibal. I know it annoys you. But I do think Will and I' Hannibal holds up his hand

'Shall we not? Lets talk of other things?'

'Yes alright. Mostly I'm thinking about Abigail at present. She's asked for permission to have an afternoon off the grounds, unexpectedly she wants to go with Will. Though she says her cousin Em will also be there.'

'Alana, that's not a good idea. Matthew Brown was stalking Will. He has been threatening only a few days ago.'

'Oh? I didn't know that. What happened?'

Hannibal goes on to outline the incident at the bar. Alana turns her face down 'oh, that's not so good. I expect Abigail didn't know. I'll ask her.'

'Might I suggest you ask Will if he knew Abigail would bring her cousin with her?'

'Oh. Yes. I shall. See if they agree with each other. Yes. Alright. Abigail is a little manipulative. Well. More than a little. I haven't met Matthew Brown yet'

'He is his own brand of manipulative. They are differently similar in many respects.'

'Oh dear. Has there been any progress on the case? What's happened with Nicholas Boyle?'

'Still unconscious. He had to be out into an induced coma, a previously undetected head injury. Which they have had to operate in to remove the pressure.'

'Nasty'

'How's your head now?'

'I think alright. Just occasionally tender.'

'I'm very glad it was not worse.'

'Yes. Me too.'

.....

That evening Will calls his dad and they speak for almost two hours. When he's done he settles in to make some papers and think about a seminar he is teaching in the next week. He goes to get some notes from his briefcase and the picture of him and Alana falls out. Oh yeah. He better shred that. He finds an old envelope and sticks it inside and then writes 'shred' on the outside.

Beverly calls him and they chat for a bit. He carries on writing an outline for the session. Just before 11 he goes out for a short walk round the house and across the field. It's cold and starry. The grass is crunchy with frost. He thinks about Hannibal. He hasn't called or texted. That's really unusual. Will must have done something really bad. But he can't think what.

Ok, maybe Hannibal's busy, or out at something, or just having an early night. Maybe he hasn't seen Will's note yet. Will spends half an hour second guessing himself until he is pretty worked up and anxious. He takes two pills and goes to sleep.

Just before midnight Hannibal picks up his cell for what must be the fiftieth time. Nothing. How very disappointing. Hannibal debates what to do. He gets out his Rolodex of recipes. Maybe he'll think about inviting Jack and Bella for a meal. Maybe Will would like to come. Maybe?

.....
Over the next few days Hannibal and Will manage to miss each other at the lab twice. Will crumbles and texts Hannibal and Hannibal replies. Hannibal can't go to something Beverly has arranged but texts Will to let him know. Will can't manage dinner with Bella and Jack because of a an evening lecture he promised to give. And so it goes on.

'Will, what's this envelope. It's been on your desk for the last week.'

'Which one? Oh yeah, thanks. I'm going to shred it'

'What's in it?'

'Picture form the dinner, me and Alana. Abigail the little monster gave both of us a copy. I made her give me the negatives'

'Oh, when you went with Alana about the walk business.'

'With Matthew Fucking Brown. Yeah'

'Does she think we never talk to each other?'

'Well she's done a pretty good job. Hannibal isn't really talking to me'

'I thought you'd both been busy? You've got the files out'

'Yeah. I know. It's more than that though. I think I did something.'

'But what?'

'I don't know

The dark black night

Chapter Summary

Some resolutions, some revolutions.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Will looks down at Winston and Cephy. Strangely they feel closer to him than most of his other dogs although they've joined the family most recently. Both of them seem to miss Hannibal too. Will feels slightly desperate about it. All the stuff to do with the mess with Abigail, the weird protection thing, the old cases, even the sweet strangeness that is Mischa. He's letting himself get overwhelmed by it all. Fuck. Fuck. Fuck.

He picks up his cell phone and looks at the last few messages he's had from Hannibal.

Will, thank you for the text. I shall be out on Saturday. A long standing theatre engagement with a former colleague. I'm sorry we seem to have missed each other over the last week. Perhaps another time? Warm wishes, Hannibal Lecter

Will, how kind of you to text. Unfortunately I shall be attending a somewhat dull but necessary board meeting that evening. I hope you are keeping well? Perhaps another time. Warm regards, Hannibal Lecter

Will, glad to receive your text. Beverly did invite me but sadly I'm not available. A future occasion I hope. Warmly, Hannibal Lecter

And today's most recent message, which to Will sounds like the end of the world,

Will. I apologise for failing to respond to your text. I hope you have been able to meet with Donald, and that you are continuing well. Kind regards, Hannibal Lecter

In between these texts Will has spoken to Hannibal maybe twice. He feels sick with the loss. He doesn't think he's done anything specifically but Hannibal seems to be withdrawing completely, and Will has no clue what to do.

It's a Sunday morning, and he laments the fact that in the past he might just have got in the car and turned up at Hannibal's house and they'd have talked, maybe read together, cooked and eaten a meal, hung out, listened to music, something. Sometimes not much of anything just being around together. Now he's slightly too scared to. In case.

Instead he gets out his cell and texts Beverly.

.....

'Alright, so show me the last few texts then, they can't be that bad, surely?'

Hannibal hands Beverly his cell phone so that she can see the last few messages that Will has sent. She hums a bit. She makes a bit of a face.

'Yeah alright I can see what you mean.'

'You can?' Hannibal is ridiculously relieved that he has not been imagining the slight cooling he had picked up in Will's recent messages.

'You know that Abigail attempted to manipulate both Will and I and drive a wedge between us. It feels like several circumstances over the last few weeks have been intended to drive us apart?'

'Yeah. But you've got passed all that? Haven't you? You said before that you'd talked about it?'

'Indeed. But I am concerned that it might plant seeds of doubt in Will's mind concerning the constancy of my feelings for him'

'Well if anyone we know was going to embark on a journey of self doubt and loss of self regard it'd be our friend Will, and the thing with the photo really threw him'

'Sadly I agree with you. A moment, Beverly. What photograph?'

'Oh, right. Didn't he say anything? You and, I think it's Dr Du Maurier dancing at your house. Well not dancing, just, well you know, embracing.'

'Beverly, I don't know about this photograph. Bedelia has only been to my house at Christmas. Oh, no. No. no. Wait. Oh dear god. There is a photograph. Oh dear. It's not Bedelia. Alana gave it to me. Why did Will think it was? No. you don't need to say a word. Damn. This is Abigail. Beverly, I can't tell you who it is, but it is not what it might seem'

'Ok. Right. Be all mr mystery. He was a bit upset.'

'I'm afraid I was too about the other picture'

'Which one?'

'Of him and Alana.'

'Oh that one yeah. He put it through the shredder. He made Abigail give him the negative eventually.'

'Why?'

'Cos she's little shit and Will didn't want her to.... oh fuck, what did she do?'

'I saw it in Will's briefcase, he asked me to get something for him, and I happened on it. I thought... I thought wrongly. Oh damn and blast.

'Yeah. No shit.'

'I can hardly show myself in any worse a light can I? Oh for goodness sake. I should have just asked him. I am never as open as needed. Well. I shall try. At the risk of making you uncomfortable we seemed also, when we were seeing each other regularly, to have reached some kind of platonic plateau.'

'Hannibal. Ok. Slightly uncomfortable but that's mainly due to the fact that's it's very early and it's a Sunday (I mean, you know, I love you and yada yada but really) and you're wearing a fucking three piece, rather than what you're actually saying. If I close my eyes and just think it's you being a worry bunny it's fine, it's just it's a weird contrast between you and the couch otherwise. Ok. Platonic plateau? Explain a tiny bit. Don't get too detailed though..'

'We seemed to have become experts at holding each other close and kissing'

'Well. Ok. That sounds nice. What am I missing?'

'That is all'

'Oh? Oh. OH!'

'Indeed.'

'Yeah. Ok. That's a bummer. Sorry. Bad choice of words'

Hannibal sighs a sad smile. 'I find myself at an utter loss. Maybe he has changed his mind and finds this the easiest way to ease out of the relationship without coming into conflict over it,
Perhaps the picture was the last straw, or the first?'

'Hannibal, trust me. He isn't easing his way out. I'd know. For sure. I even knew there was shit due to Abigail so I'd know, I promise you. And I'd tell him I was going to tell you. And he hasn't said anything, he just mentioned the photo in passing, just in case you're worrying about that now'

'So. What can I do? I am averse to confronting Will. He has enough stress in his life without me complicating his emotional responses. I am concerned that what ever it is he does feel he is given the opportunity to find it for himself without extorting that from him'

'You really think he can't say no if you want him to say yes. Or know that it's a real yes if you are saying yes?'

'I know. It doesn't sound very respectful of his feelings and sense of self. But it is something I fear.'

'Fuck it, Hannibal, are you going to let it go without a fight then, because that's what could happen?'

'If he wants to let it go, I am reluctant to get in the way of that happening organically.'

'Oh my gods. Why does this have to be so difficult. Alright. Let me see your texts to Will, are they as bad?'

Hannibal takes his cellphone back from Bev and opens a different file on his phone and hands it back to her. She looks down at it and thumbs back and forwards over the last six messages or so.

'Hannibal, do you know what your texts sound like?'

'My texts? I'm usually careful with grammar and syntax. I like them to be brief. Why?'

'Oh Hanni, (he frowns very slightly at this, and Bev takes note to not call him that again, at least only when there are others around and there's quite a lot of beer been drunk) you sound like you're gently ditching him!'

'What! Where?'

'See how you're all formal, and your greeting and farewell gets more dry and abbreviated, and the Lecter bit is back, and there's no humour, and you make no effort to arrange anything. And you basically only respond and not initiate a text conversation. And you clearly don't respond to all of them either as you apologise for missing one. I mean, ouch! If I was Will I'd think you'd already dropped me and assumed I'd get the message!'

'No! Surely not. Let me see them again' Hannibal retrieves his phone and reads through the messages of the last two weeks or so. He looks up at Beverly 'I believe you are quite correct. Fuck.'

'Wow, I've never heard you swear before, that's like catching my headmistress swearing after losing a bet on the Super Bowl, when she didn't know there were any kids nearby,' she sees Hannibal's face 'hmm, sorry about that. Just unusual, right, we're good?' Hannibal nods.

'Ok then, I'm going to make more coffee and we're going to come up with a plan'. She pauses 'again, do you wanna help or are you stuck in the couch?'

Hannibal extracts himself and they walk into the kitchen. Bev's cell phone is on the side next to the coffee maker and she sees a text alert. She starts on the coffee and idly thumbs the text open. Hannibal looks at her enquiringly when she bursts out laughing. She hands him the phone

Bev, hey. Hope you're ok? Sorry to be a pain, but have you spoken to Hannibal recently? Can I come round. Sorry to ask. It's just possible he's breaking up with me, or he wants to and I wondered if he'd said anything. Has he mentioned the woman In the pictures? Sorry to spring this on you. Don't worry if you're busy, but text me when you get a mo. Genghis Khan says hello. Will

'Ghengis Khan?'

'Will's couch. Like Vlad? He's going to get a new one though'

'I asked him to'

'Good job, maybe he'll give me Genghis.'

.....

Half an hour later Will can see the Bentley driving towards the house. He is in one of the upstairs rooms as he had been considering putting the bed upstairs and maybe getting a new couch. Something comfortable and a bit longer. Hannibal isn't much taller than him but, well, not that that is necessarily relevant any more he thinks to himself sadly. But maybe he should anyway.

On seeing the car he has a bit of a panic. Maybe he can hide, his car's here, damn. Maybe he could be out for a walk, no wait, the dogs are all here, double damn, maybe he could pretend to be ill, no Hannibal's a doctor he'll just want to help.

What Will is most afraid of is that Hannibal has decided to short circuit his slow tortuous extraction preferring instead to do the decent thing and at least tell Will face to face.

When the car pulls up Hannibal extracts himself and heads towards the front door. He sincerely hopes that Beverly is right. But he is willing to make just a little bit of a fool of himself to find out.

Unusually neither the dogs or Will are at the door before he reaches it. So he has to knock. This is an unfamiliar feeling. Being some kind of petitioner at a potential partner's door. It's not exactly uncomfortable but he finds he cannot be sure of the outcome. He never could quite predict Will.

Will answers the door and doesn't quite make eye contact. Hannibal's heart sinks, Will hasn't struggled with him over eye contact for months except when he's been exposed to a scene and can't really see anything or anyone.

He has about half a second in which to reach a decision. And faint heart never won, so he pulls Will to him and kisses him hard. There's barely a moment before Will is kissing him back equally, matching his fervour and insistence.

When they pull apart, mostly to breathe, Hannibal says 'Feed the dogs, let them out, pack an overnight bag. We're leaving in twenty minutes time.' Will simply nods and starts to turn. Instead he comes back and kisses Hannibal all over again. He moans a little, in relief if anything.

'Seventeen minutes. I shall wait by the car'.

.....

They stop twice during the journey to Baltimore each time to reassure the other that kissing and stroking isn't likely to be all that's on the menu tonight.

.....

Inside Hannibal's house Will crowds Hannibal up against the door to the hall closet. There is a considerable period of kissing and moaning and rubbing, as they both recover themselves and the reciprocity they had.

'We're going to eat first. Come into the kitchen. We are also going to discuss how we shall in future avoid what has happened over the last few weeks'

Will nods. He can see the sense in both things. He rather likes that Hannibal basically kidnapped him, that shows intent and want.

'Later?'

'I have no plans for you leaving tonight. Do you?'

Will shakes his head 'Not if you'll have me' he blushes slightly at the overtones, though actually that's exactly what he intends.

Hannibal eyes him and he says, quieter now 'I hope to'.

Will practically throws himself at Hannibal wrapping his arms and legs round him, so Hannibal effectively carries him through the hall and dining room into the kitchen and then drops him on one of the side counters. He points to it 'stay'. Will grins all over his face.

.....

Later, all Will can remember is that they didn't even get to dessert. There'd been some kind of starter, and a salad and a main dish and something small and perfect, all with something to drink, but not all wine and it was delicious. From the start they'd either held each other by the hand, or were connected by one of them pressing a foot on the other's. They'd made eye contact throughout and kissed just once or twice, hands, lips, face.

Will is just getting to the point of suggesting abandoning dessert for something else differently identical to a mutual consumption. His cell phone rings. He lets it ring and go to voicemail. A small bead of tension works its way round his neck like a necklace of worry. Hannibal's cell rings. He lets his go to voice mail too. Then his land line rings. With a sigh he stands and goes into the hall to pick it up, wordlessly he brings it back to the dining room and hands it to Will.

'Don't hate me. Really? I'm more than sorry. Why does Jack make me give you the bad news? We have a scene. I've seen the first pictures. It is shockingly awful, have you eaten? Because don't. I'll be at Hannibal's in ten minutes. Sorry, sorry. Tell him sorry, a lot!'

'You have to leave?'

'Yes.'

'A new scene?'

'Also yes'

'Will.'

'I know.'

'Will'

'8 minutes'

'Will'

'Bev says sorry. It's always her with the bad news'

'Will'

'What?'

'Phone me.'

'Yes'

'Text me'

'Yes'

'Message me'

'Yes'

'Don't not'

'Yes'

'Irrespective of the time'

'Yes'

'Or how you are'

'Yes'

'Or how much you think I will be annoyed'

'Yes.'

'Speak to me'

'Yes'

'Will you?'

'I'll try.'

'Will.'

'I will.'

'Thank you.'

4 minutes.

Will shakes his napkin and lays it on the table, he stands roughly and pulls Hannibal from his chair.

'Wait for me? Please? Don't.. please?'

'Yes, of course'

'I hate it when it's not right. I can't stand it'

'It's always right'

'But'

'Always. I promise you.'

'Yeah. Ok.'

1 minute.

'I don't want to go'

'I know, you'll come back'

'Not today though'

'Soon.'

The front door bell rings and Hannibal kisses Will as though he might not return. It's like the last few hours telescoped into one heated exchange of possibilities.

Will ducks out of the door, Bev is already back in her car waiting for him.

'Lets not say anything for the next ten minutes whilst I work out how to kill Jack and get away with it.'

.....

'He has left again. I thought you wanted him to stay?'

'He will stay when he can.'

'You do want us to meet?'

'You will soon, I promise'

'You always keep your promises'

'Whenever possible'

'Who was the woman, one of the funny team, was it the pyjama lady'

'Yes. Someone who works with Will'

'Will she be our friend too?'

'It's possible. In time. She has a good sense of humour.'

'She laughs at your puns doesn't she?'

'You know me so well. Tea?'

'You're good to me, to us, Hannibal. Thank you'

'My dearest love'

Mischa pushes the note for Will into the bottom of her pocket. She hopes he is alright. She likes him very much. Now if Hannibal will just go into the kitchen she can slip the note into the book, but he waits for her, she'll have to do it later.

#dear Will. I'm glad about the stag man. Thank you. I think it will all be fine now. And I like the plan we have for new year. I've told Hannibal I want to go up there for Christmas before the party. That way he doesn't have to worry about whether anybody wanders in the house. I've gone away before if Christmas falls on a Monday or Tuesday, so that the party can be at the weekend. I hope you'll come. Hannibal missed you. Do you remember I said he could get a bit funny? And keep it all inside. I think he was doing that. It was the photo. Love Mischa-#

.....

'That was...'

'Something else?'

'Yeah'

'I didn't know you could shout at Jack like that'

'I didn't mean to. It's going to happen again though. I can already feel it brewing'

'Not in a good way'

'Not really'

'We can go back tomorrow morning you know.'

'Unless he's a local. Yeah. We should probably do that. Bev, I gotta tell you something'

'Will! You're not pregnant?'

'WHAT? Gods Bev. You terrify me sometimes!'

'Sorry. I read a lot of fanfic. What is it?'

'This thing with Hannibal. I kind of haven't made to big a thing of it. But. Really. I want it to work out. I think he might be it.'

'Will! Have you said anything to him?'

'No, not really. I think it's obvious. I feel like I've got better at being clear. You know?'

'But you know that things where everyone knows but the person concerned. I think it's possible Hannibal is like that. And I know Alana has thrown herself into the mix just at the wrong moment several times! I love her to bits, but really.... And ffs it's not like she hasn't got other options open to her.'

'Bev?'

'Nothing, forget I said anything.'

'Bev?'

'I know. It's ok. I'm kind of resigned to it.'

'I didn't know. Shit. I'm sorry. I'm always mouthing off about her. If I'd known. What can I do? Is there anything?'

'No, you're alright. It's better this way. You know? She's just not that into me.'

'Oh Bev.'

'It's ok. Get me a muffin and coffee when we stop will you?'

'Course. Bev? You know I love you don't you? I mean, really. You're my best friend. I didn't think I'd ever have a friend like you. ...but I know it's not the same. I get that.'

Bev pulls over at the next rest stop and they get out and stretch their legs. The SUV behind them pulls in too. It decants Jack, Jimmy and Brian. Everyone is slightly subdued. Partly the scene partly the slanging match Jack and Will got into.

Two bloody angels. Horrible and beautiful in an awful way. Like the Viking blood eagle torture and execution method. Jimmy was actually sick at the scene. Never happened before. He was trying to think of an excuse when Jack said 'it's fine Jimmy, saved me having to. Just label it as yours, looks like out guy did too'

Really, Will'd been a bit off before they'd even begun. He'd like to be able to say that was an anomaly, but he knows it's par for the course now. He seems to oscillate between states of pretty good and total disaster. The good peaks getting farther apart the longer he's in the field. He and Jack disagreed big time at the scene. Will eventually losing his temper and shouting. All the team wincing. They're used to Will getting quieter and withdrawing or even collapsing. But this time he's channelling some real fury.

Maybe it was because he was called away from Hannibal. Maybe he's just had enough of everything. Maybe it was the. Oh whatever. You know what? Just fuck all their lives.

Of course Will and Jack make nice and apologise. But the damage is done and Jack has called Hannibal. Will is utterly pissed of about this too. Hannibal will be at the motel they're staying at later this evening. Will really doesn't want to have to talk about it. At all. Thanks. He'd like a glass of whisky or several. And he'd like not to have to rake over it. Just for once. Sure he was extroverting his anger instead of beating himself up about it. But was this version of Will Graham better? Or worse? Will grimaces to himself. Better of worse for who. Sorry, whom.

At the rest stop there's a bit of a swop around. Bev driving Jack and Zeller, Jimmy driving Will. Jack and Will giving each other space. Or something.

'So, you and Brian then?'

'Yes. Maybe. For now.'

'Really? I'd have thought you were solid.'

'I know and we could be, he's just very ambitious, and I'm just very domestic.'

'Do you think so?'

'I know so' Jimmy sighs 'but my aim is to have a lovely time and come out of it still friends'

'Does he know this'

'He does. He says he's not that ambitious.'

'But?'

'But I know different. I used to be him. It's ok. We're deliriously happy right now. You saw the scene?'

'Yeah. Why?'

'I feel like I've got guardian angels watching over me right now.'

'Is that the protection circle stuff?'

'That? No. just feeling fortunate. I know it's shit. For you especially. But this is the strongest the team has ever been. We rather did for the last profiler'

'Agent Starling? I don't know her first name'

'Clarice. Yeah. I liked her. But it was a bit fucked up'

'Worse than Miriam Lass?'

'Yeah, although at least Starling was through the academy pretty much.'

'What's she doing now?'

'Runs a field office out West. Jack misses her I think. He liked her. You're better, he likes you too, but probably her more. She was easier. In an uptight kind of way.'

'Thanks for that. Nah, I know I wind Jack up. You're right? Would he get her back again do you think?'

'Only if you were out of it, I think.'

'She'd be the new Will Graham!

'Not as cute though'

'You're too nice to me Jimmy'

'I told you, you bring us balance Grasshopper'

'Thanks for that. I am Mr Time of Death by Insect Activity'

'Yeah. True enough'

'Don't knock it, I get royalties every time one of them suckers sells.'

'That and the others'

'Too right. Keeps me and the dogs in the manner to which we are now accustomed'

'Wouldn't keep Hannibal in pocket squares and ties though would it?'

'Jimmy, you have no idea!'

'Sure I do, I read the society pages. I see him about half the amount you do. I can guess'

'Yeah. Fair point. Funny really. He externalises most of his high maintenance stuff into his public persona.'

'What does that say for his private persona?'

'Well. What do any of us want?'

'Acceptance, belonging, humour, passion, to be known, really seen?'

'Now you sound like Hobbs'

'He still showing up?'

'Scale of 0 to 10, I'm currently benchmarking at 4 - 5 most days. '

'Oh Will'

'Yeah. I know. I'm glad you're driving'

'So am I. Thanks Will'

'Thanks Jimmy. Do you mind if I try and get some sleep'

'Sure, you go for it'

'Wake me up if I sleep walk'

'You're hilarious. How does Dr L manage?'

'What were you saying before?'

'Alright then'

.....

Chapter End Notes

And finally it links to the next section!

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!